

THE WILEY BLACKWELL COMPANION TO

Latino/a Theology



EDITED BY

Orlando O. Espín

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Para Ricardo, compañero y amigo.

Y para quienes nos hicieron ver:

Edgar Beltrán

Orlando Costas

Virgilio Elizondo

Alejandro García-Rivera

Justo L. González

Ada M. Isasi-Díaz

Luis Rivera Pagán

Otto Maduro

+++

Podrán cortar todas las flores, pero no podrán detener la primavera.

Pablo Neruda

No va para ningún lado quien no sabe dónde está.

Gilberto Santa Rosa

Contents

Notes on Contributors	xi
Introduction <i>Orlando O. Espín</i>	1
Part I Contexts	13
1 Lo Cotidiano as Locus Theologicus <i>Carmen M. Nanko-Fernández</i>	15
2 History and Latino/a Identity: Mapping a Past That Leads to Our Future <i>Daisy L. Machado</i>	35
3 Sources and <i>En Conjunto</i> Methodologies of Latino/a Theologizing <i>Rubén Rosario-Rodríguez</i>	53
4 The Ecumenical Narrative and the Latino/a Experience <i>José R. Irizarry</i>	71
Part II Theologizing the Theological Tradition	89
5 Revelation <i>Efrain Agosto</i>	91
6 The Bible and Latino/a Theology <i>Jean-Pierre Ruiz</i>	111
7 The Latino/a Theology of God as the Future of Theodicy: A Proposal from the Dangerous Memory of the Latino/a Jesus <i>Sixto J. García</i>	129
8 Jesus the Christ <i>Neomi De Anda</i>	155

9	Theological Musings toward a Latina/o Pneumatology <i>Néstor Medina</i>	173
10	Catholic Ecclesiology <i>Gary Riebe-Estrella, SVD</i>	191
11	Protestant Ecclesiology <i>Edwin David Aponte</i>	199
12	Grace, Sin, and Salvation <i>Roberto S. Goizueta</i>	215
13	Eschatology and Hope <i>Luis G. Pedraja</i>	231
14	Latino/a Ethics <i>María Teresa Dávila</i>	249
15	Liturgies and Sacraments <i>Latinamente</i> <i>Eduardo Fernández, SJ</i>	269
Part III Theologizing Latino/a Realities		281
16	<i>Mestizaje</i> : The Latina/o Religious Imaginary in the North American Racial Crucible <i>Jorge A. Aquino</i>	283
17	Theologizing Social and Economic Justice <i>Matilde Moros</i>	313
18	Queer Theory and Latina/o Theologizing <i>Robyn Henderson-Espinoza</i>	329
19	Feminist Theory and Latina Feminist/Mujerista Theologizing <i>Nancy Pineda-Madrid</i>	347
20	Theologizing Immigration <i>Victor Carmona</i>	365
21	Theologizing Popular Catholicism <i>Rebecca M. Berrú-Davis</i>	387
22	Theologizing Popular Protestantism <i>Edwin David Aponte</i>	401
23	The Study of Spirituality <i>Gilberto Cavazos-González, OFM</i>	421
24	Latina/o Practical Theology: Reflections on Faith-Based Organizing as a Religious Practice <i>Altagracia Pérez</i>	439

25	Latino/a Religion and Politics <i>Elieser Valentín</i>	453
26	Inter-Religious Dialogue: Why Should It Matter to Our Academic and Grassroots Communities? <i>Carlos F. Cardoza-Orlandi</i>	475
	Index	493

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Introduction

Orlando O. Espín

Since the late 1970s there has developed among Latino/a scholars of religion a manner of theologizing that has become known as *Latino/a theology*. The chapters in this volume will offer the reader a panoramic view of this theological approach. This Introduction will attempt to generally describe Latino/a theology, as well as clarify a few terms and methodological approaches.

Latinos and Latinas

Latinos and Latinas – also referred to as Latinos/as or Latinas/os or Latin@s or Latin@’s or Hispanics – are the US communities and persons whose cultural and historical roots are to be found in Latin America.¹ As we begin this volume, a few very important clarifications on the term or expression “Latinos/as” are in order, in order to help the reader understand its usage, and to begin delving into the contexts that begat Latino/a theologies.

1. The reader must remember that what today we call “Latin America” is a smaller geographic version of what for several centuries were the Spanish and Portuguese empires. At least half of today’s US territory was part of the Spanish colonial world. With military actions that led to the seizure of large territories not originally its own, the US geographically grew to most of its current size.² The territories forcibly incorporated, however, were not empty or without history – their populations were also forced to join the US, but as conquered peoples.³

2. There are now (2015) approximately 60 million Latinos/as in the US, most of whom were born in the US; of those who were born elsewhere the majority are naturalized US citizens or permanent residents. Latinos/as, consequently, are not identical with “Latin Americans” any more than Irish Americans or German Americans can be thought of as identical to today’s Irish or Germans. Most Latinos/as today are not immigrants. They constitute today the largest “minority” and the fastest-growing group of ethnic/cultural communities in the country.⁴
3. Today in the US there is no *one* Latino/a culture or community. There are *at least* 20 Latino/a cultural communities, all internally diverse, and all historically and ethnically very distinct. Some of the diversity results from the differences in ancestral lands of origin of each of the communities, but the diversity must also be explained as due to the US locations where these communities developed (e.g., a Latino/a of Dominican roots is not a Latino/a of Guatemalan roots, nor is a Mexican American from East Los Angeles the same as a Mexican American from Homestead, Florida). Depending on the US geographic location, one or another of these Latino/a communities will be the local or regional majority, but never to the exclusion of others. For example, in the states of Florida, Rhode Island and New York, Latinos/as of Antillean origins (i.e., Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Cubans) are the demographic majorities, but not to the exclusion of Mexicans, Nicaraguans, Colombians, and so on. In the District of Columbia to be Latino/a is very likely to be of Salvadoran origin, while in New Orleans it’s to have Honduran roots.
4. Denominational demographics have also been significantly impacted by the growing Latino/a presence. For example, the majority of the members of the largest US denomination (the Roman Catholic Church) are now Latinos/as; and in some Roman Catholic dioceses the Latino/a presence is overwhelming (e.g., Miami, Los Angeles, and New York, but also Anchorage, St Cloud, and Atlanta). The growth of the Episcopal Church in the US since the year 2000 has been mostly due to Latinos/as, and the same can be said – *mutatis mutandis* – in many other denominations (e.g., United Methodist Church, American Baptist Convention, Assemblies of God).
5. Although it is evident that the majority of Latinos/as identify themselves as Christian (regardless of denominational affiliation), one cannot ignore the fact that there are Latino/a Jews, Muslims, Lukumí, Buddhists, and so on, as proud of their ethnicity as any other Latino/a, making *latinidad* a more diverse reality than ‘is popularly assumed. Of growing importance, furthermore, is the increasing number of Latinos/as who do not identify with *any* religious tradition or denomination – not “secularized” in the North Atlantic sense of the term, but “unaffiliated” in the ways of silent protests against denominational orthodoxies.
6. Despite the evident diversity, Latino/a communities still have much in common. The extended family and a popular religious cosmovision⁵ are the two strongest pillars of Latino/a cultures across all differences, serving as the interpretive, organizing “grids” for most people’s daily reality and understanding. Also shared

by Latino/a communities is the defining role(s) of older women in the families – especially (but not exclusively) in matters ethical and/or religious. Bilingualism remains the norm, helping shape much of the inclusive understanding of Latino/a cultures, as well as the preservation of cultural elements molded during the Spanish colonial centuries. Depending on the communities, or groups thereof, the contributions of Africans remain strong,⁶ or the still-living legacy of the First Peoples of the Americas.⁷

Latino/a theology

This is a volume on *Latino/a theology*. But what is that?

As mentioned earlier, religion has been and remains a hugely important component of all Latino/a cultures, and so any attempt at understanding the latter requires an equally serious understanding of the former. The same is true about Christian theological traditions in the US.⁸ The reader should beware, however, of identifying “religion” only or mainly with its institutional expressions, or with its orthodoxies – among Latinos/as, “religion” is familial before it’s institutional, and inclusive more than orthodox.⁹ The language and categories of North Atlantic social scientific, philosophical, and theological thought tend to be blind to, or marginalize, what does not “fit” their self-proclaimed normativity and universal validity (i.e., their culturally constructed “orthodoxies”).

Consequently, the study of Latino/a religion, if methodologically done *latinamente*, must not fall prey to approaches that would force foreign or colonializing analytical categories onto Latino/a realities. This does not obstruct dialogue, but it prevents it from becoming a subtle way of continued colonization. It is one thing to dialogue with and engage someone else’s categories, and another to not see that the categories are *someone else’s*, reflecting the interests and perspectives of their creators.

Latino/a theology was born as a methodological approach to the study of Latino/a religious reality, as much as a contributor to the overall study of Latino/a communities and realities that also interpret themselves through inescapably religious lenses. Latino/a theology was born in a Christian context and till this day remains a (Catholic/Protestant/Evangelical) ecumenical enterprise, although sooner rather than later it will have to engage other Latino/a religious dialogue partners who – because they *are* Latino/a – will need to enter the conversation on the most grounding of Latino/a cultural elements.

I am not aware of any one definition of Latino/a theology (Catholic, Protestant, or Evangelical) that might have become broadly standard among those of us who work in the field. A few authors or commentators have proposed one or another descriptive definition – but other commentators (also Latino/a) have invariably offered improvements to the attempted definitions or descriptions (cf. Espín and Díaz 1999; Fernández 2000; Aponte and De La Torre 2006; Espín 2007; Nanko-Fernández 2010).

Latino/a theology now has a long enough history, a “critical mass” of qualified practitioners, and a large body of published literature. The chapters in this volume will acquaint the reader with much that Latino/a theologians have already offered the

academy. Latino/a theology was born at the intersection of European and European American theologies, on the one hand, and of Latin American liberation theologies, on the other – an intersection which did not occur in either Europe or Latin America, but did in the US, and here within the extraordinarily diverse contexts and realities of the Latino/a communities. *Lo cotidiano* was and remains the birthing place of our theology.

From its inception, Latino/a theology has always understood itself as being neither a copy, nor a translation, nor an adaptation of other intellectual traditions. Latino/a theologians began their work critiquing the universalizing and colonizing pretensions of European and European American theologies, as well as recognizing that we were not in Latin America (thereby questioning as well the temptation to simply translate or adapt Latin American theologies to our US context, although at first we borrowed much from Latin American liberation theology).

I don't think that in the late 1970s and early 1980s we had read postcolonial theory, but postmodern thought was beginning to raise questions in some of us. In any case, when the Latino/a theological critique of dominant theologies started, with the tools we had then (mostly borrowed from the Latin American critique of ideologies), it began by insisting that, theologically, "we are we" and therefore "we are not they." This led to a number of publications on the significance of culture, particularity, and ethnicity for theology – and this is the first characteristic of Latino/a theology: our emphatic rejection of universalizing and marginalizing European and European American thought, coupled with the equally adamant affirmation of Latino/a cultural and religious identity.

We needed to open "our" space, speak with "our" voice, discuss "our" issues, and very insistently announce that we were not someone else's "pastoral problem" or "bibliographic footnote." We insisted on being included as equals in the theological conversation – consequently, particularity and culture, the critique of dominance and white privilege, and their implications for theology and for the defense of our people in a social and ecclesial reality adverse to them, became and remain the grounding characteristic of our theologizing.

In a quest for the sources of a distinctly Latino/a theology, we turned to Latinos/as themselves – to their faith, their Christian experience, their cultural expressions, and the broader Latino/a intellectual tradition. And it is in this quest that many of us began to work through such issues as "the popular," epistemology, praxis, spirituality, *lo cotidiano*, and so on. Any Latino/a theologian can readily confess that work in these and other areas has been far from sufficient – new answers raise many more questions which in turn lead to newer areas and further questions and answers.

There is no question in my mind but that Latino/a theology has always tried to be sensitive and responsive to the social, economic, and political realities of Latinos/as. Our theology has also been just as sensitive to popular expressions of the Christian faith. We have frequently included data and analyses on Latinos/as made available to us by the social sciences, and attempted to theologize from the human reality described by the data and analyzed by colleagues in the social disciplines. We have tried to step behind the external expressions of faith (some of which might not coincide with dominant understandings of Christianity) and there listen to the faith of everyday Latinos/

as, not by pretending that Christianity could somehow exist without expression, but by not equating the former with the latter, or the dominant with the orthodox norm. “Why and how do Latinos/as believe?” are not idle questions in and for theology. Indeed, to understand how Latinos/as “construct” what they hold to be real and good and important is crucial to the Latino/a theological movement. The last three or so decades have begun the process of theological study of popular (Catholic and Protestant) Christianities, and the incorporation of social scientific interlocutors into our theological dialogue – both in a clear and conscious attempt to listen to our people, and to recognize in our communities’ life and faith a source for our theology. How could one conceivably do theology (any theology) today while disregarding the social reality or the faith expressions of the very Christian communities one claims to be serving and understanding through theology – indeed, of the very People of God whom we doctrinally claim to be “the Church”? How can anyone do theology today (any theology) and not consider the believing people’s real, daily faith and life as pre-eminent theological source – thereby critiquing the contemporary theological fixation of (in practice) regarding biblical, ecclesiastical, or theological *texts* as more important sources for theology than the *living faith* of the real People of God?

Latino/a theology was born within various Christian denominations. Although Latino/a Catholic theologians as a group, perhaps, had an earlier impact, it is transparently clear that Latino/a theology and theologians have been insistently ecumenical. Four names very frequently appear at the origins of the movement: Virgilio Elizondo and Edgard Beltrán (Catholics) and Justo González and Orlando Costas (Protestants) – they are jointly regarded as “founders” of a way of theologizing (beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s) that soon thereafter became known as Latino/a (or US Hispanic) theology. Others followed, taking up the challenge of developing the methodologies, identifying the sources, and so on, and all else that we now assume as part of this theological movement.

From the start, and I don’t think I exaggerate, Latino/a theologians have been sensitive to the ecumenical needs of our communities, as well as respectful of intra-Latino/a denominational differences. The truly sororal and fraternal spirit evident among most Latino/a theologians (which, unfortunately, is not always paralleled at the congregational level) opened within our movement not only the opportunity for excellent trans-denominational friendships, but also for such trans-denominational programs as the Hispanic Summer Program, the Hispanic Theological Initiative, and our two theological journals (*Apuntes* and the *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology*). This in turn has contributed to the birth and development of a theology ecumenically respectful and sensitive. This shared respect and this shared interest in each other’s traditions have impacted Latino/a theology over the last three decades, and increasingly more so.

Latino/a Catholic and Protestant theologies, consequently, have been ecumenically sensitive and ecumenically cooperative – Catholics did not discover Protestants, or vice versa, after we began to theologize: we have always theologized together, even when writing from within our respective ecclesial traditions, and we can’t understand our respective theologies without each other. This is a gain that our denominations and local congregations will do well to emulate.

But just as I have emphasized the ecumenical spirit among most Latino/a Catholic and Protestant theologians, I want to also underline that most of our published works bear the mark of our denominational affiliations: we write from within our traditions, and this (at least in my mind) is both a “plus” and a “minus.” We are familiar with the work of the European, European American, and Latin American theologians of our denominations. Catholics know their Catholic theologies. Protestants know their Protestant theologies. And no one is embarrassed to engage their own theological traditions in dialogue and mutual critique. We do not hide who we are. Yet we clearly assume all of our denominational traditions to be limited, always contextual human efforts at understanding what is often beyond all understanding, just as we also assume our distinct theological traditions to be bearers of much wisdom and insight.

The same honesty that led us to demand our voice and our space as Latinos/as in society and academy has also made us appreciate the denominational traditions which nourished us as Latinos/as and announced the Gospel to us. Most Latino/a Catholic and Protestant theology, over the last three decades or so, has been denominational as well as ecumenically respectful – but the next step will have to be the construction of a truly ecumenical, Latino/a theology which can be received as reflective of shared faith and of common heritage. There is a growing need to show that the ecumenical spirit can be translated into actual theological works.

There is no question in my mind but that one significant dynamic within Latino/a theology, over the last three decades, has been the ever-increasing reception and incorporation of methodological concerns and issues raised by feminist critical theory – from the growing interest in *lo cotidiano* to the critique of gender roles, to a whole other set of critical issues originally raised by Latina feminists outside theology (think, for example, of Gloria Anzaldúa, Milagros Peña, and many others). Latina feminists have begun to impact Latino/a theology (and not just that theology done by women), with particular emphases on *lo cotidiano* and on epistemological critique, on the protagonism of women and gender/sexual minorities, on the critique of Latino/a cultural sexism, and so on.

As Latino/a theology continues to develop after thirty or more years, it remains crucially important to ask, *Who validates our theology?* Who says and confirms that we are theologically doing what we should be doing? These are questions intimately connected with an inescapable one: *Who benefits from our theology?* These are not just theoretical questions – they are eminently ethical issues. Theology (all theology) is ethical or it is not “theology.”

Latino/a theologians work under the same pressures and demands as all other theologians: we have to publish and teach, go through tenure and promotion review processes, seek the highest professorial ranks, deal with university administrators and deans and publishers and students. And so on, and so forth. We all know what academic life is like and what are its exigencies, because we are part of it. The point I am making is that Latino/a theologians are also responsible to the theological academy, and we are judged by the standards of that academy. Our work must be scholarly, rigorous, self-legitimizing, publishable (and published), and so on – like everyone else’s. We,

Latinos/as in the academy, have exactly the same things required of us as do our colleagues, and so does our scholarship ... although we know that this is not really true. Why? Because we often face, in our various institutions, the biases of colleagues and administrators who consistently demand more of us than they would demand of themselves, as if requiring us to “prove” that we are their equals.

However, and this is an extremely important “however,” even when granting that we do need to have our theology validated by the academy, that is not the real and most important validation we require and seek. Indeed, there is another validation that is the key to our *not* being co-opted by the dominant academy’s acceptance or applause (or by the dominant academy’s politically correct need to convince itself of its own openness while remaining factually deaf to all who are not part of the dominant). I am speaking of the validation which comes from our own Latino/a communities. *The question for Latino/a theologians is whether our work in fact furthers the goals of our people – their struggles for equality and dignity, for decent housing, education and health care.* An equally necessary question is whether our theology prophetically challenges our people to grow beyond our biases, our idols, and our sins. If the social, political, economic, and religious reality and understanding of Latinos/as are not positively affected by our theological work, then the applause or acceptance of the (dominant) academy means nothing – or perhaps it means that we have betrayed our communities’ trust. The requirement of validation by the people remains.

Teología de conjunto (or *teología en conjunto*) has been identified as a manner of doing theology frequently identified with Latino/a theologizing. A group of theologians (i.e., a *conjunto*) gather – sometimes with pastoral agents, or with scholars from other fields – and, *together*, “create” theology – each bringing his or her own expertise to the group, but all working together for the same purpose and on the same topic. There are a few models of *teología de conjunto*, but they all emphasize the communal, conversational, shared style of doing theology as a *conjunto*. It is needless to say that since the late 1970s or early 1980s much has been written by theologians individually; therefore it would be inaccurate to assume that all Latino/a theology has been created as *teología en conjunto*. But even the individual works have involved and been built upon a great deal of consultation and conversation.

So, what is Latino/a theology? I’d suggest that it is a movement, a contextual perspective, and a methodological approach to theologizing within (academic) Christian theology.

1. It is distinguished by a cultural, critical, contextual, justice-seeking, and non-innocent interpretation of Scripture and doctrine, society and church, and history. It is intent on understanding these in order to impact and empower the daily reality, daily faith, and daily struggles for justice of Latino/a communities, while acknowledging and honoring Latino/a cultures, histories and stories, daily reality and popular faith as legitimate and necessary sources of/for Christian theology.
2. Consequently, Latino/a theologizing can and does focus on either traditional or contemporary topics within Christian doctrine and biblical interpretation.

Hence, there is no “topic” typical of, or unimportant to, Latino/a theology – what is unique are the sources, the methodological approaches, the starting point and perspective, the contexts, and the intent.

3. In explicit dialogue with other theologies and other scholarly disciplines and fields of learning, and ecumenically sensitive (with growing inter-religious awareness too), Latino/a theology is distinct in its *en conjunto* methodological approach and in its reverent passion for the real life, faith, and cultures of Latino/a communities, extended families, and persons.
4. If all theology is “faith in search of understanding,” then Latino/a theology assumes, honors, and incorporates the faith of Latino/a Christian communities, their manner(s) of searching, and theological understanding(s) that explain(s) real life and further empower(s) the Latino/a people.
5. Latino/a theology is a contributor to the broader theological academy because it methodologically demonstrates that theology is not and ethically cannot be “books speaking with books.” It models a scholarly pursuit that is a committed, reasoned understanding of the lives, struggles, and faith of real people in real sociocultural situations that cry out for justice.

If any definition is supposed to state and describe the meaning and reality of that which it defines, then the preceding paragraphs might be regarded as a valid definition of Latino/a theology.

However, there is an issue still raised among Latino/a theologians: does the theologian have to be personally Latino/a in order for her or his theological production to be Latino/a? How much *latinidad* is needed in order to identify a theologian or a theological work as “Latino/a”? It seems consensually settled that the theologian (Latino/a or not) has to be personally involved with Latino/a communities to such a degree that his or her theology be truly and unquestionably born from “the heart of our people” (i.e., from within, and consciously reflective of, Latino/a people’s lives, reality, faith, cultures, and so on) – a perspective and knowledge had not through books or journals or occasional encounters but only through daily (personal, committed, and prolonged) engagement.

Latino/a theology is important for the non-Latino/a for the same reasons feminist theology is important for those who are not women – both are necessary for the construction of a more just and inclusive world. Both are reasoned and prophetic discourses calling us all to build together that just and inclusive world. If a man or a non-Latino/a were to think that such a world is not urgently important, or that it could be built regardless of the continued marginalization of much of the human race, then – for that man or that non-Latino/a – both feminist and Latino/a theologies would be unimportant. And just as there are women who reject any association with feminism and feminist theology, so there are Latinos/as who would rather ignore or reject any identification or association with Latino/a theologies.

Hans U. von Balthasar did not write anything on US Latino/a theology, but he did say that many of today’s theologians could be accused of a cowardly passing by of our world’s anguish and pain, deaf to the cries of their fellow humans, while

continuing to develop their theories and theologies, detached from the real present (von Balthasar 2000: 27). All US theologians, Latino/a and European American, Native, Black, and Asian American, Catholic and Protestant, women and men, should pay heed.

Diversity

The present volume reflects and expresses the diversity of Latino/a theology and theologians: women and men, young and old, heterosexual and LGBTQI, from Protestant, Evangelical, and Catholic ecclesial backgrounds, from different social classes and several racial configurations, from a variety of Latino/a cultural communities and from different regions, yet all sharing the passion and learning that characterize Latino/a theology.

The *Companion* is divided into three unequal collections of chapters. Part I gathers four chapters that will serve as contextualization for the rest, and especially as contextualizing texts for the study of all Latino/a theology. The chapters in Part II reflect, *latinamente*, on some of the topics most frequent in any Christian theological tradition. And Part III theologically discusses issues of very significant interest and importance for US Latino/a communities and churches today.

Evidently not every single issue has been, or could have been, included in this book. Not all Latino/a theologians found a space herein, and some could not participate, for reasons beyond their or our control. This volume is intended to *initiate* the reader into the study of Latino/a theology and theologians, but not to limit the reader to its contents or mislead the user into assuming that “this is it.” Think of this *Companion* as the launching pad where a journey begins, but not as the landing strip where it ends.

The contributors and this editor hope that you, the reader, will come to greater understanding and appreciation of Latino/a theology, its methodological approaches, and its contributions to Christian theologizing. And its potential.

Notes

- 1 I prefer “Latino/a” (sometimes pronounced as the single word “Latinoa”) because it reflects the more common pronunciation and usage, but I by no means claim that this is the more “correct” or only possible spelling or pronunciation. Each author in this volume has been free to use the identity term they choose, as long as it reflects actual usage. Furthermore, each author has been free to use the spelling they choose of certain terms, as well as to choose italicization or not of Spanish words or expressions or of “Espanglish” terms. This editor has not attempted a standardization of spellings and usage because either none exists or because some of the authors have chosen to make a theoretical point by their defiance of rules.

- 2 In 1819 (the US invasion of Florida), 1846-8 (the US invasion and seizure of Mexico's northern half), and 1898 (the US conquest and occupation of Puerto Rico and Guam). In 1898, the US also seized Cuba and the Philippines, but in 1902 Cuba became independent, as the Philippines did in 1947. Alaska was purchased from Russia in 1867, and Hawaii was illegally "deeded" to the US in 1893.
- 3 The later granting of citizenship to these populations did not change, and still has not changed, their treatment and perception as "second-class" US citizens. And as in many other situations of coloniality, there will always be those of the conquered who will support the colonizer.
- 4 Cf. <http://www.census.gov/population/hispanic>.
- 5 By "popular" I do not merely mean that this *cosmovisión* (broader and deeper than a worldview) is widespread, although it certainly is. By "popular" I more precisely want to underline that it is the people's – "popular," we recall, is the adjective derived from the noun "people." On inescapable Latino/a popular religious cosmovision, cf. the chapters in this volume by Berrú-Davis and Aponte on "Theologizing Popular Catholicism" and "Theologizing Popular Protestantism," respectively; and also, cf. Espín (1997) and Aponte (2012).
- 6 Throughout most of the colonial period, the enslavement of Africans was commonplace in what were the Spanish and Portuguese empires. Few Latin American countries kept the slavery system after independence (Brazil being the most conspicuous, finally abolishing slavery in 1888). Although Africans of many ethnic backgrounds were captured and enslaved between 1497 and 1888 (the centuries of Black slavery in Latin America), the Yoruba, Igbo, and Fon seem to have suffered enslavement more frequently – like no other African ethnic community – in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies. The Yoruba and Igbo today are mostly in present-day Nigeria, and the Fon in present-day Benin. The Yoruba's and Igbo's descendants are, in greater or lesser numbers, in most Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America, as well as in Brazil. The Fon's descendants are mostly in Haiti and Brazil, but also in the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Darién region between Panama and Colombia. *Mulataje* has been a very important historical avenue for the preservation of Africa's influence among many Latinos/as. We cannot assume that every Latino/a community bears an African people's influence, although more do than many Latinos/as would admit. Racism is also a Latino/a reality.
- 7 The First Peoples of Latin America were and remain numerous, despite the terrible genocides that occurred during and after the colonial period. The presence or absence of a First People's cultural influence will depend on the Latino/a community'. More influential (because of the root countries of the more numerous Latino/a communities) have been the Nahuatl of south central Mexico, and the Maya of southern Mexico and northern Central America. *Mestizaje* has been a very important historical avenue for the continued importance of First Peoples' influence among Latinos/as. Parallel to what has been said in n. 6 of the African presence, we cannot assume that every Latino/a community bears a First People's influence. Racism is, again, also a Latino/a reality.
- 8 No one can credibly claim to reflect Christian theologies or churches in the US while factually disregarding (and thereby factually marginalizing) the largest ethnic/racial minority in the country.
- 9 Orthodoxies seem to be defined by exclusions, because the affirmation of an orthodoxy requires the affirmation of heresy and heterodoxy.

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PART I

Contexts

CHAPTER 1

Lo Cotidiano as Locus Theologicus

Carmen M. Nanko-Fernández

In the United States of America (USA), daily living (*lo cotidiano*, *vida cotidiana*) in its varied concrete expressions is explicitly or implicitly the starting point for much of the theologizing done *latinamente*. Attention to *la vida cotidiana* by Latin@ theologians and biblical scholars shares a thread with other contemporary movements from the latter half of the twentieth century whose consideration of the quotidian is noteworthy. In Latin America, liberation theologians turned toward critical scrutiny of socioeconomic and political realities in order to articulate, encourage, and enact gospel-based praxis that was both liberative and transformative. The “turn to the subject” in European theologies influenced Karl Rahner, for example, to begin his analysis with such human experiences as knowing, freedom, and the search for meaning. The turn to the experiences of women, specifically, characterized the early efforts of primarily North American, feminist scholars to retrieve long-ignored stories across the span of the Christian tradition, resulting in a necessary re-evaluation of what had been considered normative. The focus on daily lived experience by theologians and other scholars from the global South and marginalized racial and ethnic communities in América insured that these investigations would not exclude the exploitative consequences of racism, colonialism, and imperialism as well as sexism in all its diverse manifestations.

Lo Cotidiano as Locus Theologicus

For any number of Latin@ theologians *lo cotidiano* functions as *locus theologicus*. In other words, ordinary living is privileged as source, provides content, particularizes context, and marks the spaces and place(s) from which Latin@s *do* theology. Such theologizing avoids abstraction and is admittedly polyvocal and fluid.

Latin@'s affirm that lived reality is *source* for divine revelation and as such worthy of theological reflection. Lo cotidiano as lived en nuestros barrios y nuestras casas, en comunidades y familias, in the particular and the local, from the underside, peripheries, and grassroots is a dynamic matrix of sin, grace, and ambiguity, of the perceived presence of God as well as of the perceived absence of the divine. The ordinary as experienced through our hybridities, bodies, senses, struggles, fiestas, socioeconomic status, and migratory and historical legacies offers legitimate starting points for critical investigation.

Lo cotidiano provides the *content* for theologizing. The concrete and miscellaneous stuff of life informs humble attempts to articulate understandings of the sacred and their implications for our relationships with each other and the whole of creation. A forthright preference for those who are poor and/or marginalized makes la vida on the borders, or on the move, or on the edges of poverty necessary foci for consideration of the *imago dei*. Bodies broken by addiction, violence, incarceration, or the burdens of conditions that disable speak to the mystery of the incarnation. Celebrations of life amid struggles, or praxis navigating the tensions of social justice, or popular religious practices taunting the sting of death signify eschatological hopes.

La vida cotidiana does not occur in a vacuum; neither does the theologizing that arises from within the rhythms and disruptions of the ordinary. While certain experiences such as death may be both inevitable and to a degree universal, theologizing from lo cotidiano appreciates the particularities of *context* in ways that challenge scholarly flights of abstraction and temptations to impose homogeneity. Such a stance takes seriously not only the questions arising from particular slices of life (trozos de la vida), but the multiple responses, expressions, and strategies for making sense, surviving, and thriving.

To conceptualize lo cotidiano as the *place* of theologizing is to admit the situatedness of all interpreters and perspectives. To do theology latinamente entails an intentional mapping of the theologian's location in relation to the slices of the daily being explored and the communities to whom one is accountable. Presumptions of objectivity are dismissed as the biases and preferences of being implicated are critically taken into account and identified. Locating oneself within a web of relationships, influences, and experiences indicates an awareness of theologians as embedded and implicated insiders/outsideers. In the academy, this seems to be an expectation only of so-called "contextual theologians"; however, Virgilio Elizondo noted "I would like to see theologians and biblical scholars start with a brief biographical statement of their sociocultural conditioning. It would help the reader to appreciate both the richness and limitations of their work" (2009: 268, footnote 14).

Some would like to dismiss this careful concern for identity and its construction from rich and varied pieces and experiences of life; but for Latin@ theologians it is an ethical responsibility to be self-aware, especially for those who seek to articulate, signify, and make meaning from within faith communities. Biblical scholar Fernando Segovia points to the particularity of perspective that each theologian brings to this enterprise: "[a]t a fundamental level I have used my life story as a foundation for

my work as a critic in biblical studies, as a theologian in theological studies, and as a critic in cultural studies I have relied on both the individual and the social dimensions not as binary oppositions but as interrelated and interdependent” (2000: 155).

Methodological Considerations

Doing theology from the departure point of *la vida cotidiana* is necessarily an interdisciplinary enterprise. This type of engagement draws on the wisdom, observations, and methods of other disciplines, fields of study, and interpretive perspectives. These include, but are not limited to, the natural sciences and social sciences; liberationist, postcolonial, diasporic, migration, linguistic, and culture studies; gender studies, and feminist and queer theories; critical race theory, literary theory, and philosophy; grassroots activism, street art, and even the culinary arts. Inevitably such scrutiny reveals the complexity of each *trozo de cotidianidad* and cautions against simplistic appropriations and forced correlations in order to bolster a predetermined theological supposition.

Interrogations from multiple perspectives yield insight yet point to the limitations of all analysis. These limitations highlight the need for collaborative engagement and alliances especially with others who similarly find themselves and their communities on the margins. The commitment to collaboration is manifest practically in a doing of *teología en conjunto*, in other words together in communities of mutual accountability, and *de conjunto*, in ways that affirm that the resulting creation belongs not to a single scholar but to the collective, to *la comunidad*. The use of the Spanish word for community is intentional here because it draws on a distinction made by Puerto Rican scholar Juan Flores that is helpful in comprehending both *teología en conjunto* y *teología de conjunto*. Flores observes that the term accentuates the two constitutive parts, *común*, i.e., what we share in common, and *unidad*, i.e., what binds us beyond our “diverse particular commonalities” (2000: 193).

For theologies done *latinamente*, this distinction emphasizes that the construction of knowledge is perceived in terms of a series of commitments to the networks from which they arise. *Latin@* theologians are responsible to each other, especially to those with whom they engage in communal processes that allow for spirited and mutual exchanges of lived experiences and ideas within physical and/or virtual space. Under the umbrella of our *latinidad*, with its multiple particularities, the fruits of these shared labors are not only “ours” but belong to our communities and churches of accountability. This focus on *la vida cotidiana* serves as reminder that the work of theology is invested in and for the sake of real communities; therefore theology is always a matter of *teología y pastoral en/de conjunto*, a lived experience of *acompañamiento*.

Attention to daily living emerges from an appreciation for relationality, expressed in terms of *convivencia*, literally living (*vivencia*) together. Theologian Gary Riebe-Estrella explains that the “*vida* found in *lo cotidiano*, which forms the basis for *vivencia*, is not an individualistic kind of experience ... Rather, *vida* for Latinos is understood within our

sociocentric cultural world as a shared reality... not simply *vivencia*, but *convivencia* As such, *convivencia* speaks of the intimacy out of which *la vida* comes" (1999: 211–12).

Exploring the Daily by the Trozo

This exploration of lo cotidiano is not intended to be exhaustive, comprehensive, or even representative. Instead the approach taken here is drawn from the lived experience of the Spanish gastronomic tradition of las tapas. These small plates of food typically are shared and are limitless in their variety; but any given taverna offers a limited selection based on local tastes, available resources, and culinary creativity. Tapas are rooted in the ordinary and some tales of their origins include provenance of a practical nature. They serve as invitation to enjoy the possibilities of a rich culinary cuisine, yet taken together they can suffice as a filling meal. Tapas inspire conviviality, because of the spaces and manner in which they are served; however, they are often complex in taste and sophisticated in presentation.

The same can be said for this selection of la vida cotidiana as investigated by a cross-section of Latin@ Christian theologians and biblical scholars. These slices of life are organized thematically, and highlight the contributions of particular theologians and scholars. This organizing principle does not suggest that these are the only aspects of lo cotidiano accessed by each scholar, or that these trozos are mutually exclusive, or that these are the only sources forming and informing theology done latinamente. In fact often they intersect in ways that demonstrate the complexities of la vida cotidiana and the social location of the respective theologians. For the most part, commentaries on Latin@ theologies identify these trozos as characteristics of doing theology latinamente and/or as theological loci (for example, Gonzales 2002). I am proposing instead that these are all slices of daily life that provide points of departure and are accessible from a rich variety of sources and investigated with any number of diverse analytical tools. As part of our daily weave they serve as loci theologici, tapas on an inexhaustible menu of possibilities.

Tapa: Hybridity

One of the earliest sources for theologizing latinamente was the daily lived embodiment of hybridity, articulated as mestizaje, by Virgilio Elizondo, one of the padrinos of Latin@ theologies. A Mexican American Catholic from Texas, Elizondo experienced dis-location as a mestizo in the borderlands between the USA and Mexico. In this region, Latin@ descendants born of centuries of religious, cultural, linguistic, political, racial/ethnic, and biological mixture were frequently despised and considered as belonging to neither side of a contested border. From this experience of being mestizo in this land conquered by imperial powers, first by fifteenth-century Spanish conquistadores and later by

nineteenth-century USA Anglo-Europeans, Elizondo conjectured Galilee as a borderland characterized by hybridity and peripheral to Jerusalem which he suggested was at the center of Jewish life in first-century CE Roman-occupied Palestine. From this marginal crossroads God acted in a self-revelatory manner in the person of Jesus, who proclaimed a gospel of inclusivity. For Elizondo, "Galilee would never become the center, but it was the point of departure for the beginning of a new creation, as the Galilees today continue to be points of departure for new humanities to emerge" (2009: 277–8).

While he acknowledged the violence of the conquest that made possible the *mezcla* of América, his assessment of *mestizaje* is optimistic. Elizondo took up the hybrid bodies at *la frontera* (border) that have for generations been reviled for their impurity, the "stones neglected by the builders" of both the church and the USA nation, and he reconceptualized them as the "new creation." He infused these hybrid stones with theological significance, positing christological, ecclesiological, soteriological, and eschatological dimensions.

Elizondo began his investigations into the lived experience of hybridity at the Institut Catholique in Paris, France, with his 1978 doctoral dissertation "Métissage, violence culturelle, annonce de l'Évangile: la dimension culturelle de l'évangélisation." This research became his groundbreaking 1983 book *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise*, and its theological content was pastorally implemented in his years of ministry as rector of San Fernando Cathedral in San Antonio, Texas (2000a: 127–9). His ongoing reflections as a theologian led him subsequently to interpret the Guadalupe event as "the beginning of a new creation." He found in the hybridity of La Morenita "the mother of the new humanity, the feminine heart and face of God" (Elizondo 1997: 70). Juan Diego, through his responses, in turn became "the new mestizo who is no longer ashamed of the ways of his people ... nor fearful of and subservient to the ways of the dominant" (Elizondo 1997: 112). In the Guadalupe event, Elizondo perceived an embodied hybridity with transformative power to resituate the relationship between conquerors and vanquished people in ways that transcended the limitations of both: "Whereas the *mestizaje* of the conquest was destructive of everyone, the *mestizaje* of Guadalupe is reconstructive of everyone" (1997: 112). By reading the Guadalupe event and the *Nican Mopohua* through the lens of *mestizaje*, Elizondo, in effect, produced a counter-narrative to the accounts of USA national origins that marginalized peoples, in particular Latin@'s, on the basis of race, culture, ethnicity, and language. Elizondo suggested such an appropriation offered another vision for reimagining *mestizaje*, one whereby the once rejected and despised are now the promise of a new humanity. At the same time he is loath to perpetuate cycles of violence by inflicting on others, including oppressors, what has been done unto mestiz@s. Instead he proffers a theological anthropology rooted in a progressive synthesis and in an inclusive vision where the future is mestizo (Elizondo 1997: 132; 2000b). Elizondo moves from the *mestizaje* born of two conquests in the Western hemisphere toward claims of universal *mestizaje* found in contemporary permutations of mixture that are in part facilitated by globalization and migrations. His assessment remains hopeful: "Mestizo peoples inhabit the

‘in-between’ of nations and cultures, playing a painful but creative mediating role in processes of intercultural encounter that foster a gradual movement from closed particularities to a more open universality” (2009: 279).

Elizondo’s systematic attempt to establish a particular expression of embodied biological and cultural mixture as locus theologicus is a major contribution that opens doors for other Latin@ considerations of hybridity lived in lo cotidiano. One of the more comprehensive and critical surveys of this usage is *Mestizaje: (Re)Mapping Race, Culture, and Faith in Latina/o Catholicism* by the diasporic Guatemalan Pentecostal theologian Néstor Medina. In his careful treatise, Medina notes concerns about rehabilitating a highly racialized category with its destructive legacy rooted in colonial constructs that sought to classify people in order to exercise power over them. He specifically attends to the erasure and/or sublimation of indigenous peoples that occurs in the celebration of mestiz@s as a new humanity through categories and symbols focused on intermixture. Medina’s caution cannot be dismissed easily, especially since the treasured mother of the new creation is also “the perennial reminder of the conquest and eradication of the indigenous religious traditions” (2009: 123). Rubén Rosario Rodríguez notes an additional obstacle in ecumenical terms: “For Elizondo, the Guadalupe event is foundational for Latino/a cultural and religious identity, and it is granted the same authority as Scripture, a move that creates rather than eliminates barriers between Roman Catholic and Protestant Latino/as” (2008: 94). Any number of Latin@ theologians with roots in the Caribbean have raised doubts that a term created with a specific intermixture in mind can adequately embrace all hybridity. Their additional misgiving is that such a configuration tacitly eliminates the African diasporic root from Latin@ identities, thus replicating cycles of omission and racism. Biblical scholar Jean-Pierre Ruiz is among those theologians questioning the rehabilitation of mestizaje, and while he too explores hybridity, he is averse to the construction of the Galilean Jesus in ways that detract from his Jewish identity (Ruiz 2010: 18–22).

The promising work of Latin@ scholar Robyn Henderson-Espinoza takes a new and challenging approach to mestizaje as embodied reality. Like Elizondo, the influence of Chicana theorist Gloria Anzaldúa is especially noticeable here as well. Henderson-Espinoza chooses to reread mestizaje by the “mauve light of Latin@ queer theory” (2014: 1). In the process, mestizaje is not rehabilitated; rather it is queered: “Queering Mestizaje re-imagines desire not as an act of Eurovision invasion but as a form of desiring difference” (Henderson-Espinoza 2014: 10). This destabilizes mestizaje, yet at the same time creates “new spaces of in/betweenness,” blurring identity and resisting dominant impositions that privilege gender binaries and complementarity (2014: 11). At the intersections, Henderson-Espinoza imagines queering mestizaje as an intentional act with ontological significance and opening up new directions in relationality: in the construction of familia, in the interstices between “institutionalized religion and queer spiritual practices” (2014: 12). Ultimately Henderson-Espinoza’s developing thought evolves toward consideration of a proposed MezQueerTaje reality, an eschatological horizon, a not-quite-yet in/between space where intermixture does not entail the suppression of difference.

Tapa: Las Vidas de las Latinas

A number of Latina theologians were among the first to explicitly examine and take seriously *lo cotidiano as locus theologicus*, primarily self-described *mujerista* theologian Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Latina feminist theologian María Pilar Aquino. While their respective approaches vary, their scholarship displays a profound respect for the lived experience of women; exercises a hermeneutical privileging of the preferential option for the poor; and the demarcation of public and private spheres that leaves the experiences and wisdom of women, and poor women especially, on the margins.

A Cuban exile, Isasi-Díaz investigated *lo cotidiano* with the aim of understanding oppression and enacting liberative praxis. She sought change in structures and functioning at both the macro and micro levels, yet was apprehensive about top-down approaches that rarely impacted life for the women who were among the poor and oppressed. She accessed *la vida cotidiana* of Latinas in grassroots communities in the USA via ethnographic research and by accompanying particular communities and cultivating relationships. She paid special attention to *la lucha*, the struggle to survive and live that most affected those who found themselves marginalized by their socioeconomic status and gender; and to the narratives and practices that sustained these women.

Isasi-Díaz readily admitted that it was difficult to define *lo cotidiano* but possible to describe its multilayered complexity. The daily encompasses the point of initial contact with the world as well as the milieu of ongoing engagement. It is configured by space, time, place, materiality, and proximity. *Lo cotidiano* refers “to the problematized daily reality – that is, to the limitations imposed by the material-historical reality one faces every day, and to the personal situations in which we find ourselves as we try to deal with such problematized reality” (Isasi-Díaz 2011: 48–9). It embraces responses to the trials of life as well as the points of departure for imagining different ways of living, being, and relating; thus it has the potential for resistance and subversion. Precisely because of its specificity with regard to social location, relationships, tribulations, and narratives, it challenges claims of universality and tendencies toward abstraction: “*lo cotidiano* is the reality strung along the hours in a day; it has to do with the food we eat today, with the subway or bus fare we have to pay today, with how to pay today for the medicine for a sick child or an elderly parent” (Isasi-Díaz 2011: 50).

For Isasi-Díaz, beyond the descriptive task, *lo cotidiano* has hermeneutical and epistemological importance. As part of its hermeneutical function, *lo cotidiano* exposes power differentials and their role in securing the status quo and obstructing liberation. Attending to *la vida cotidiana* and engaging the interpretive task makes day-to-day oppressions visible and unmasks those who benefit from them (Isasi-Díaz 2002: 12). Isasi-Díaz is careful to note that Latinas are not defined by their suffering of quotidian oppressions; rather it is *la lucha*, the struggle to survive, , and overcome oppression, that generates self-understanding (Isasi-Díaz 2004: 39). Finally, Isasi-Díaz attributes epistemological significance to *lo cotidiano*. The source and framework for theologizing that seeks to be transformative is to be found in the construction of knowledge from within *la*

vida cotidiana of grassroots Latinas, on their own terms, in their own words, and in response to their challenges of navigating daily living on the margins. For Isasi-Díaz, this is so because these Latinas “know reality in a unique way because they transform it when they manage to survive by somehow providing shelter, food, clothing, medicines for themselves and their families” (2002: 14). Isasi-Díaz’s theologizing remained grounded in la vida cotidiana when she was waiting for a bus (2011: 52–4), accompanying Latinas in grassroots communities (Isasi-Díaz and Tarango 1992, or reflecting on her own lived experience of exile (1999: 13–28, 35–56). This living fueled her commitments, which in turn were enacted in liberative praxis and lived in hope of the justice of God’s kin-dom.

María Pilar Aquino frames her reflections on lo cotidiano from the self-designated location of being

a Mexican woman linked by background to the migrant-worker *bracero* tradition; as a Latin American feminist scholar who lives and works in the United States but is linked by moral imperative and intellectual demand to the worldwide critical feminist theologies of liberation; and as a Roman Catholic Christian woman linked by hope to all those around the world who believe that another world of justice for the well-being of all is possible. (2005: 132)

She asserts that lo cotidiano, as an analytical category, arises not from “androcentric liberation theologies” but from the contributions of critical feminism, particularly from European and Latin American contexts responding to totalitarianism (Aquino 1999: 38). In lo cotidiano, kyriarchical and patriarchal power are exposed especially as they impact the institutions and relationships that constitute daily life, including family, church, politics, and culture. In turn, Aquino examines critically the historical and spiritual experiences of oppressed women and interprets them in the light of faith in order to contribute to the liberation of all humanity (1993). With a hermeneutic starting point in an explicit option for poor and oppressed women, she engages and critiques systematic formulations of theology, including Latin American liberation theologies, for their disconnect from the lived realities consigned to the margins of private and domestic spheres. For Aquino, liberation theology done by women, rooted in the concrete realities of lo cotidiano, is a specific form of women’s struggle for their right to life (1993).

Like Isasi-Díaz, Aquino too aims for transformation and sees it as a theological task:

what makes Latina thought theological is that it formally focuses on our day-to-day practices sustained by the liberating visions and traditions of Christian religion and faith. There may be other religious languages that reflect on our religious customs and traditions, but what makes Latina thought liberative is that it deliberately focuses on our daily activities aimed at transformation toward greater justice. (2002: 152)

For Aquino, lo cotidiano bears salvific value, in that the presence of God is experienced and witnessed to in the daily struggles of people for a just and better life; and this

invites active participation “toward a new humanity ... until we reach God’s definitive salvation” (1999: 39).

Catholic women are not alone in making a theological option for the daily lives of Latinas. Latina evangélica Loida Martell-Ortero addresses salvation as an embodied event experienced in the ordinary spaces of *la vida cotidiana* (2013: 43). Such particularity and concreteness demand an ethical imperative manifest in a commitment to justice. Martell-Ortero explains that the locus theologicus for evangélicas can be found in the marginal and powerless spaces of the everyday, places described by the women in her congregation as threatening to themselves and their families. These women shared their stories of their struggles for the basics, their efforts to survive and protect their young, “how they sought to shield their babies from rats in dilapidated buildings, or how they covered up broken windows with cardboard in the dead of winter, fearing for the health of their children” (Martell-Ortero 2013: 43).

From this evangélica perspective, Martell-Ortero affirms the role of the Holy Spirit as part of the incarnational presence of the divine, active within the community. In the daily, the lived experience of God is professed in personal testimonios, sung in familiar coritos, and interwoven with the biblical narratives that provide counter-narratives to the stereotypes and fallacious myths that seek to debase the dignity of those who live on the margins and in-between (Martell-Ortero 2013: 47). Situated within *la vida cotidiana*, with all its complexity, messiness, and struggle, Martell-Ortero perceives soteriology arising from Latina evangélicas as posing a challenge to soteriologies from the center: “When seen from the lens of liminal spaces of survival, salvation must by necessity become an incarnational event that responds to the daily suffering of forgotten people” (2013: 52).

Tapa: People on the Move

There is no ubiquitous experience of displacement and/or migration, a reality confirmed by the diversity of theological reflections on these trozas de nuestra vida cotidiana emanating from Latin@s. Theologizing that takes into account the social locations of theologians results in a spectrum of insights depending on the particularity of the lived daily experience as well as the analytical tools employed for interrogation. A recent study of Latin@ theological and biblical scholarship identified and explored three tropes with broad appeal: *frontera*/border, *exilio*/exile, and *diáspora*/diaspora (Nanko-Fernández 2013). It is worth considering some of the findings from this survey.

The *border* surfaces as primary locus for any number of Mexican American and Tejan@ theologians. The theologies of Virgilio Elizondo, Arturo Bañuelas, Nancy Pineda-Madrid, and others reflect the fluidity of life along contested *fronteras*. Reflections on *exile* are especially predominant among Cuban American interlocutors. The work of biblical scholar Francisco García Treto, theologian Justo González, and mujerisata theologian Ada María Isasi-Díaz is among some of the prime examples of

exiles reflecting theologically on their own cotidianidad. For Boricuas, Nuyoricans and other dispersed Puerto Ricans such as theologians Luis Rivera-Rodríguez, ethicist María Teresa (MT) Dávila, and biblical scholar Jean-Pierre Ruiz, postcolonial interpretations open up experiences of *diaspora* and internal migrations – a complex relationship of being simultaneously colonized and imperial citizen.

Frontera / Border

On the border between the USA and México, the people are not only “on the move” but have historically been “moved in on!” These lands are the product of multiple conquests and varying movements of peoples for centuries. This reality complicates any reflection latinamente and is at the root of conflicted responses to the ongoing migrations reshaping populations in North America. Borderlands are characterized by spatial, human, and material hybridity and motion. From a theological perspective this creates a new historical moment. Arturo Bañuelas, a Mexican American theologian and pastor of a Catholic parish on the El Paso–Juárez border, suggests “the unique *mestizo* border reality is a *kairos*, a moment of grace and opportunity experienced in the decisive action to act as bridge people between the Americas” (1992: 294). Movement of peoples, in all its good and sinfulness, in this case has soteriological and eschatological significance. From the standpoint of *mestizaje*, Bañuelas contends that the role of bridge “has as its task the elimination of all cultural, political, sexual, and economic boundaries to pave the way for the fashioning of a new historical project that subsists in the unfolding of God’s reign” (1992: 294).

Such a project is rooted in an appreciation for solidarity, a concept Bañuelas grounds in latinidad. He writes,

Tu eres mi otro yo is the Latino way. We are all linked as one. We stand together, or we fall together. We are each other, and we need to help each other. Our ancestors teach us: If I despise you, I despise myself. And if I promote the good in you, I promote the goodness in me and everyone else. (2010)

From this perspective, immigration reform is about all Latin@’s because all are impacted by the lies that cut to the heart of Latin@ identity. For Bañuelas, “The lie is that immigrants, and by association all of us Latinos, are disposable as human beings and not worthy of human dignity and respect. And this lie is killing us” (2010). He locates life’s meaning in solidarity, especially en conjunto with those who are poor and struggling, and in this particular case those living on the edges and in the shadows because of their immigration status. While both a concern for solidarity and the protection of human dignity are enshrined in Catholic social teaching, Bañuelas contextualizes these principles, as well as the teachings of Christ, as that which our “fathers, mothers, and abuelos” have always taught, as “Latino good news” (2010).

Bañuelas does not romanticize poverty or struggle, nor does he canonize those who are on the margins because of their condition or situation. He recognizes that those who are marginalized and poor

aren't all good or saintly people, but the very fact that they live in hopeless situations calls us to ask whether our own lifestyle is gospel-based or materialistic. It makes us hungry for a deeper spirituality and makes us wonder if we're living shallow, artificial lives. The poor are saying: yes, you are. (2009: 28)

For Bañuelas, responding in *lo cotidiano* from a posture of solidarity with those who struggle, especially the immigrant and the poor, is transformative.

Exilio/Exile

Biblical scholar Francisco García-Treto situates himself in the broader, centuries-old tradition of Cuban exilic experiences, "not only when I locate myself in the contemporary Cuban diaspora for whom exile from the *patria* (fatherland) is a historical reality, but when I use that location as a standpoint from which to reflect on the biblical exile and its literary products as a target for interpretation" (2009: 72; 2000: 134). For him, "exile," with its connotations of expulsion and loss, better expresses his experience than the less specific term "immigrant"; however, he prefers the term "diaspora" because it connotes openness to life in both Cuba and the USA (2000: 135). This experience also brings bilinguality as a constitutive aspect that informs his scholarship and his identity as a biblical hermeneut. He juxtaposes biblical texts, such as Lamentations, with Cuban exilic texts drawn from the works of other writers of Cuban diasporas, such as José Martí and Daína Chaviano, in order to focus his

emotional resonances with the loss caused by exile from "the City," be it Jerusalem or Havana, even to the choice of a victimized and defiled "Daughter City" as a central figure whose suffering puts into question the fairness or applicability of former values. (2009: 77)

This interaction of survival literatures across time marks García-Treto's stance in reading "the Hebrew Bible as exilic, not only chronologically (product) but discursively (content)" (Segovia 2009: 372).

In his interpretation of the patriarch Joseph in Genesis, García-Treto finds resonance with the lived experience of some Cubans in exile, a move from the peripheries to assimilation to success (2000). While Joseph became Egyptianized, he never totally abandoned his roots, though it would certainly have been understandable considering the betrayal by his kin. He retained his language, familial obligations, cultural patterns, and a desire to be buried at home. It was through the ministrations of this hyphenated immigrant that the future of his people was insured and the host nation survived catastrophe. For García-Treto, those who read Genesis 39-41 as exiles in some sense look in a mirror, finding their own risks and dangers and survival choices reflected; however, they also

turn there to read hope into their own situations, “hope that their pilgrimage will somehow turn out for the best, that it was to ‘save life’” (2000: 144). Ultimately, García-Treto finds a tale of salvation and a message to people on the move and the communities that receive them: “José is a human being and not a stereotype, who, given a chance, may contribute considerably more than we can imagine to our common good” (2000: 144).

Diáspora / Diaspora

Puerto Rican theologian Luis Rivera-Rodríguez self-identifies as a “transnational diasporan,” in other words, “one who has come from another country, conditioned by colonial relationships with Spain and the United States, and who has resettled in the United States while keeping real and imaginary relationships and connections to the place of origin” (2006: 23–4). He reads biblical texts and migratory contexts, aware of the variety and distinctiveness of migrations and diasporic survival strategies. He urges a critical retrieval of biblical texts, seeking to avoid interpretations that marshal texts on behalf of social justice while ignoring inconvenient aspects of their non-innocent histories. As an example of caution, Rivera-Rodríguez reminds contemporary audiences, “The God of the Deuteronomist is also a god who promotes the conquering of territories, the destitutions of indigenous populations, the genocide of native peoples, the discrimination of foreigners, and allows the subordinate and dependent status of resident aliens” (2006: 32).

For Rivera-Rodríguez, theological, ethical, and pastoral responses to migrations in all their complexities call for a “practice of a political hermeneutics.” This entails recognition of differences and commonalities across historical contexts as well as a critical appreciation for and appropriation of “the possibilities, limits, and ambiguities of these traditions as resources” (2006: 34). A political hermeneutic acknowledges the interaction between interpretation and the situatedness of hermeneuts especially in terms of “our social locations, ideological commitments, strategic agendas, reading strategies, and religious and ethical options” (2006: 34). Rivera-Rodríguez advocates what can be described as an intertextual approach between biblical texts and the lived experiences and sources that provide direction for addressing the complexities of migration in *lo cotidiano*. Rivera-Rodríguez seeks to avoid imposing anachronistic and shallow correspondences across texts and contexts dealing with people on the move. At the same time he is cognizant of intersections across texts and contexts and finds such connections illuminative. This leads him to posit what he calls “a mediating liberation model of critical correspondence or, in Hispanic/Latino theological lingo, ‘reading in Spanish (correspondence) from the diaspora (otherness and engagement) through Hispanic eyes’” (1998).

Tapa: Lo Popular

From the beginning, Latin@ theologies made an option for “lo popular”; in other words, that which because of its origins in ordinary participants and in ordinary places is literally “of the people.”

Popular religion

Catholic theologians such as Orlando Espín, Roberto Goizueta, Virgilio Elizondo, Gilbert Romero, and Jeanette Rodriguez were among the first to consider, as loci theologici, popular expressions of faith experienced in lo cotidiano. This move was a departure from the disdain or indifference expressed toward popular religion by the strands of Latin American liberation theology most known to English speakers. In the USA, Latin@ theologians saw in popular Catholicism tactics for navigating the daily, ways of handing on cultural and religious values, and a means of surviving and resisting especially in environments hostile toward la vida latina. For Espín (1997) the faith of the people presented “*an epistemology – a way of knowing and constructing the ‘real’ by means that are culturally specific, grounded in equally culturally specific experiences of God and of the Christian message*” (2006: 9). These ritual texts of and in lo cotidiano

in all of their complexity, are embedded and embodied theological reflections that evoke and reflect creative, affective, sensuous, and even kinetic means of responding to the divine presence in the concrete circumstances and quotidian rhythms of human existence. These popular religious expressions are forms of traditioning, catechizing and pastoral caregiving; they do not separate strands of living or place them in contrived correlations that seek to distinguish culture from religious tradition. These manifestations of the “faith of the people” blur distinctions between secular and sacred activity, public and domestic space, official and unofficial church ritual. (Nanko-Fernández 2014b: 22)

Among the varied expressions explored by Catholic theologians are local Via Crucis (especially in San Antonio and in the Pilsen neighborhood in Chicago); devotions to particular saints and Marian manifestations; practices related to Día(s) de los Muertos, Posadas, and Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe; home altars, fiestas, and rites of passage such as Quinceañeras. Latin@ theologians from other Christian communities and denominations have identified and reflected upon popular expressions within their traditions as well including coritos and testimonios.

The Via Crucis in particular is a significant expression of popular Catholicism for many Latin@ Catholics. Theologians such as Roberto Goizueta (1995), Orlando Espín (2002), and more recently Christopher Tirres (2014) have reflected on the intersections of this expression of popular Catholicism and the daily lived experiences of Latin@ individuals and communities. They see in these expressions recognition that God is present in daily living and accompanies people through las luchas they face on a daily basis.

Consider, for example, the Vía Crucis organized by Asociación Tepeyac in New York City. The Stations of the Cross are familiar but the text discloses particular challenges weighing on this local community. At the Second Station, “Jesus Carries his Cross,” the script declares, in English and Spanish,

Jesus carries a cross he does not deserve and suffers what he need not suffer. We do not deserve to emigrate, to leave our land and our people, nonetheless, we have to work to support ourselves and support our family, for lack of possibilities in our own land. (Gálvez 2006)

On Viernes Santo (Good Friday) this Víacrucis del Inmigrante winds through the corridors of financial and federal power in lower Manhattan. Latina cultural anthropologist Alysha Gálvez describes the confusion of employees on Wall Street spilling into the streets at the end of the business week confronted by the drama unfolding before their eyes (2010). In first-century garb with twenty-first-century taunts, Roman soldiers shout “Walk! Walk, illegal! Camina Ilegal!” as the crucified Christ passes 26 Federal Plaza, the historic address of the office of US Citizenship and Immigration Services (Gálvez 2010). The scandal of the crucified Christ is retold with all its complications in idioms contemporary and ancient. The absurd stumbling block is contextualized, ritualized, and performed in expressions and practices that continue to invite investment and challenge all that demeans life. The message and medium are intertwined in ways that engage the senses and situate the participants, willingly or accidentally, in the midst of the action. The incarnation, God-among-us, as one-of-us, is mediated concretely in relevant ways that open imaginations to encounter and grapple with the complexities of the mystery of the Incarnation. In these expressions of the “faith of the people” there is recognition that God is present in *lo cotidiano*. In turn, through the *Vía Crucis*, the faithful accompany Jesus and his mother in a time of profound suffering. These practices function as resistance to conditions that violate human dignity, that defile the reign of God, and at the same time, as in the case of the *Víacrucis del Inmigrante*, they call for transformative praxis. In the words of Espín, such popular expressions constitute “a rejection of the privatization of religion which negates the potential role of religion to denounce social sin and advocate a more just social order” (2002: 151).

Popular culture

In a worldview where distinctions between the sacred and secular are blurred, the faiths of the people find expression in multivalent practices that need not be explicitly religious. Scholarly reflections on the daily are not limited to theologians. Latin@ culture scholars have long considered the representation of *lo cotidiano* as constructed in sport, art of all kinds, performance in various media, space, and place, as not simply reflective of life but as active in the construction of complicated identities, in imagining new possibilities, and in creating an improved future. These formats and fora “are crucial because they open spaces, counter-sites and conditions of possibility” (Habell-Palán and Romero 2002: 7). These expressions of *lo popular* similarly engage multiple modalities of human engagement – creative, affective,

sensuous, kinetic; serve to tradition and/or resist; and are investigated from an array of analytical lenses and interdisciplinary tools.

A few Latin@ theologians have ventured into explorations of popular culture as part of a broader conceptualization of lo cotidiano. Examples can be found in the anthology *Creating Ourselves: African Americans and Hispanic Americans on Popular Culture and Religious Expression* (Pinn and Valentin 2009), and in several articles published in the online *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* on telenovelas (De Anda 2008; Cavazos-González 2008), cyberspace (Hidalgo 2008) and border wall art (González-Andrieu 2008). The most sustained effort in the consideration of popular culture as locus theologicus is the scholarship by Carmen Nanko-Fernández on baseball/béisbol (2014a: 68–87; 2011: 73–5; 2010: 87–109).

Sport is intricately intertwined in the fabric of our daily living and its complexities are worthy of our theological attention. While to any number of fans professional sport is primarily a form of entertainment, for others there is more – a link to treasured memories or loved ones, an expression of local identity or loyal affiliation – even across generations. For fans, however, sport too can be the source of suffering brought about by misguided loyalties, exacerbated rivalries, or destructive celebrations that end in violence. Sports speak to the passions of the heart, precisely because they invoke memories, sustain identity, and bind us to people and places.

I self-identify as an Hurban@ theologian, a hybrid urban Hispanic from the Bronx, NY. By geography I was born and raised a Yankee baseball fan, and later chose to be ecumenical by supporting the crosstown Mets. Mi tía worked for the Yankees, so that meant summer hours at the stadium, and an occasional gorra or bat came our way from promotional give-away days. My father taught me how to play baseball and, like many poor kids in the Caribbean, I too fashioned a glove out of cardboard, until finally at the age of 12, years of praying paid off and I got my first leather glove. In 2004, I was “traded to Chicago,” as I understand my move to teach on the faculty of a theological graduate school located in the “Windy City.” It coincided with the trade of then Yankee pitcher José Contreras to the White Sox. My first homesick act was to attend this Cuban exile’s first game in his new south-side stadium – an act of solidarity among urban migrant workers.

When explored latinamente as un trozo de cotidianidad, baseball becomes a contested site where race, colonization, heteronormativity, migration, and poverty complicate idealistic and nationalistic interpretations of the USA “national pastime.” For any number of players, béisbol is more than just a game. Take, for example, the reality that for most aspiring peloteros from the Dominican Republic, béisbol is about work, with the expectations of being able to put food into many mouths or a solid home over the heads of extended familia or building a safe ball field in el barrio. This web of responsibilities that weigh on those who are invested with the communal hope and obligation to get out of poverty is captured best in an expression the players use to describe their competition against the more economically privileged USA players. They want to “take away their food,” “quitando les la comida” (Bretón and Villegas 1999: 48). This expression reveals

the uncomfortable fact that baseball really is about daily survival and access to those most basic staples of human rights: food, shelter, and life; and sometimes that occurs by employing any means necessary.

The role of Major League Baseball (MLB) in exploiting the labor resources from the global South coupled with the struggle to use baseball as a ticket out of poverty complicates ethical considerations, for example, on the use of performance-enhancing drugs (PEDS). Employing a postcolonial lens in an investigation of this slice of life exposes levels of hypocrisy and complicity that leave many, including those of us wearing our team colors, *con las manos sucias* (with dirty hands). To see MLB *latinamente* is to complicate a slice of daily life that holds up a mirror and implicates us in ways that demand we consider the ethical obligations of *convivencia*.

An Open Menu

For Latin@' theologies, *lo cotidiano* is not abstract, monolithic, or univocal. To comprehend *la vida cotidiana* as *locus theologicus* is to appreciate the accessibility of divine revelation in the daily, the particular, and the local. To explore *lo cotidiano* is to recognize its complexity and the posture of humility necessary in the presence of mystery. To embed *en nuestra cotidianidad* is to accept the ethical obligations that *convivencia* demands. *Tapas* serve as an appetizing introduction to the depth and breadth of a greater culinary tradition. From the classic to the eclectic, they provide a taste of what is already available as well as a hint of the endless possibilities open to creative as well as practical imaginations.

Note

This chapter employs Spanglish as both an intentional writing strategy and a metaphor for the hybridity constituted by the Hispanic presence in the USA. Spanglish is one of many terms used to describe the fusion of Spanish and English in daily communication. It is manifest in this chapter through the following conventions. First, words and expressions in Spanish are not italicized unless they appear as such in direct quotations. At times sentences include both languages; words without obvious English cognates will be translated in the text only the first time they appear. Second, I created @', the 'at' symbol (*el arroba*) *with* a combining acute accent mark. I borrow the use of @ from others because it conveniently combines the "o" and "a" into one character that is gender inclusive and at the same time destabilizes gender polarities. I add the acute accent (@') as a reminder of the fluidity of language, culture, and identity and to emphasize the significance of location in theology done *latinamente*. I develop these themes in my book *Theologizing en Espanglish* (2010). Please note that "América" refers collectively to the lands of the Western hemisphere and not solely to the USA.

The section "Tapa: People on the Move" includes some material previously published in Nanko-Fernández (2013). This material was excerpted, edited, and modified with permission.

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CHAPTER 2

History and Latino/a Identity Mapping a Past That Leads to Our Future

Daisy L. Machado

How does one tell the history of Latinas and Latinos in the United States? Does one begin in the southwest telling the story of those who lived in territories occupied by the Spanish, long before the arrival of the settlers of Jamestown or those who traveled on the *Mayflower*? Or is this history one that really begins in 1848 after the Mexican–American War, in which about half of what were Mexican territories were incorporated into the United States, as this newly created political and geographical border encompassed Spanish-speaking populations and landscapes? Then there is the Spanish–American War in 1898, which led to the annexation of Puerto Rico and sowed the seeds for the great migration of Cubans over sixty-five years later. The 1980s brought the next great wave of Latinas/os to the United States, this time from Central America, especially El Salvador and Guatemala, driven by the violence of revolution, poverty, and unemployment. In the 1990s there was another great wave of immigrants, from the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia and other countries in South America, as the southern continent faced unemployment and economic instability. It would seem that the history of Latinas/os in the United States is one that has been shaped by waves of violence, poverty, interventionism, neoliberalism, failed economic policies, and revolutions, and because of this it is a history that cannot be told in isolation – it can never be just the history of *mexicanos* or *puertorriqueños* or *gutaemantecos* or *cubanos* or *venezolanos*. The history of Latinas/os in the United States is a history about the micro and the macro of the Latino reality; it is about the history of a specific and unique Latino group, but it is also about how that one group, whether Mexican or Cuban or Peruvian or Dominican, becomes a part of that larger bundle of relationships that is the Latino community in the United States. The history of the Latino community in the US is a history in which the country we migrate from does not matter, nor does it matter if

we are born here, because once we enter we undergo a false baptism (since we are such religious people) which gives us a new name and an unwelcome identity: *Hispanic*.

Given these realities, we can say that the history of Latinos in the US is not only about borders crossed, but also very much about racial mixture that includes the *mestizaje* of Indian and Spanish blood, the *mulatez* of Spanish and African, the whiteness of *criollos*, and the brown tones of the indigenous people, as well as other racial mixtures that are the reality of human pigmentation in the Americas. Truly, as has been said before, Latinas/os are a rainbow of pigmentation. And added to this great racial diversity, we are also a rainbow of ethnic diversity – the Cuban Jew, the Arab Dominican, the Chinese Nicaraguan, the Japanese Peruvian. Given that the US still favors the limiting and no longer helpful biracial black–white racial discourse, Latinas/os have posed and continue to pose a racial challenge to both whites and blacks in the country, and are at the same time pushed out because Latinos are racially “other”. Journalist Ed Morales says this about the racial worldview prevalent in the US:

The problem for Latinos is that we are neither viewed as Americans – being consigned to a South of the Border ethos and all the foreign-tongued otherness that it implies – nor are we viewed as white, black or even Asian in the American race hierarchy. Even now, as bipartisan politics must recognize that the country must confront the racial divide, Latinos are made invisible through negation. *Neither black nor white* says that they lack the historical baggage of either group. (Morales 2002: 25)

So, given all these complex and multilayered realities, to tell the history of the Latino community in the United States means that we need to begin with imagination and perception, or, better said, with the lack of imagination and the poor perception that the dominant Euro-Americans have had of the Latinas/os that share with them the national territorial space.

The Latina/o as Fiction

The well-known novelist Carlos Fuentes is reputed to have said, “The United States has no history; it only has the movies.” To this Arturo Madrid, professor of humanities, has replied,

My statement would be that the United States has no history, rather it has images and stories that have dissembled a history. These images and their accompanying stories predate the movies. Notwithstanding the continuing struggle to eliminate them from U.S. culture, they continue to be present in the consciousness of the citizenry of the United States, and to manifest themselves in their outrageous forms and in more subtle but no less nefarious ways. (Madrid 2001: 99)

The point being made by both writers is not that there really is no history, but that history in the United States, the national historical epic that is at the heart of US

self-identity, is not so much about fact as about what is being called an *historical imaginary*. And this imaginary for Fuentes can be found on the screen of movie theaters, and for Madrid can be found in the many images and stories that are embedded in the national consciousness. Stories about those Madrid calls “aliens, misfits and interlopers.”

That is why I like a phrase from W. E. B. Du Bois who, in writing about North American Blacks, said, “we are more than we seem.” Du Bois was describing the reality of a “double consciousness” for African Americans in which there is “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (DuBois 1903: 2–3). These are the images and stories about Latinos that Fuentes and Madrid were describing. I believe that this double consciousness may indeed be the reality shared by all racial ethnic people living in the US, and I want to affirm what Du Bois claimed: “we [Latinas/os] are more than we seem.” In this statement we find a counter-narrative to the normative national story of the Latino: the idea that all human beings have a depth to their being. And because these stories and images are so embedded in the national historical narrative that has become normative, in order to tell a history of Latinos in the United States we need to critically peel back the layers of that narrative and consider issues about identity, historical imagination, borderlands, and race. And it is by uncovering these layers that we are able to more clearly examine the realities of this community of over 53 million Latinas/os living in the US today.

And Where Are *You* From?

Let’s begin with some statistics as a first layer of the Latino story. According to the US Census Bureau, the Latino population in 2012 was 53 million, making up 17 percent of the US population, and Latino population growth between 2000 and 2010 accounted for more than half of the nation’s total population growth (Pew Research Hispanic Trends Project 2013). The largest group within the Latino community consists of those of Mexican origin, about 32 million, followed by Puerto Ricans at 4.6 million, 1.8 million Cubans, 1.6 million Salvadorans, and 1.4 million Dominicans (US Census Bureau 2010). Furthermore, “the 100 largest counties by Hispanic population contain 71% of all Hispanics ... [and] half (52%) of those counties are in three states – California, Texas and Florida. Along with Arizona, New Mexico, New York, New Jersey and Illinois, these eight states contain three-quarters (74%) of the nation’s Latino population” (Pew Research Hispanic Trends Project 2013). This information is important for our analysis because it clearly identifies the borderlands in which Latinas/os live – lands, especially those in the southwest, that have been contested throughout the history of the United States, territories that have been witness to war and to conquest of the people already there: first the sixteenth-century Spanish Roman Catholic conquest, followed by the nineteenth-century Protestant conquest of the ever-expanding newly formed republic of the United States, eager in its early years to expand westward. But the borderlands where Latinas/os live are not only in the southwest.

In places like New York or Florida or Illinois, the Latino presence is still that of outsider despite the fact that Latinas/os have lived in those states for generations. Take, for example, Ybor City in Tampa, Florida. While today most Euro-Americans know about the Cubans in Miami there is little knowledge of Ybor City in Tampa. This town became the capital of cigar making when two Spaniards, Vicente Martínez Ybor and Ignacio Haya, built a cigar factory on land they purchased in the early 1880s with the hope of providing a good living and working environment (Westfall 1985). Long before there was Little Habana or *Calle Ocho*, “Ybor City developed as a multiethnic community where English was a second language for many of its citizens. Cubans made up the largest group, about 15 percent of them were African Cubans” (Charleton 1990). Not only did Ybor City become the “Cigar Capital of the World” but it was also a key center of support for Cuban revolutionaries fighting to expel Spain from Cuba. It was in 1895 that the revolutionary junta meeting in Ybor City, led by José Martí, voted to launch an armed revolt against Spain. Here in this corner of the United States we find a place of safety for revolutionaries seeking freedom from Spanish colonization. Ybor City in the late 1880s (Cubans), Chicago in the early 1910s (Mexicans), New York City in the 1930s and 1940s (Puerto Ricans), and Miami in the early 1960s (this time in reverse: Cubans fleeing a revolution) are some of the earliest examples of the migrations of different Latinas/os to the United States, a story recreated in the 1980s and 1990s in cities such as San Francisco or Washington, DC, or upper Manhattan in New York City, when *salvadoreños*, *nicaragüenses*, *dominicanos* also traveled north replenishing, expanding, and adding to the complexity of the Latino mosaic in the United States.

Being Latina (or Hispanic, as we are also referred to) can mean very different things depending on where you live in the United States and who is defining you – again a reminder that Latinos are being looked at through the lens DuBois describes. In some parts of the country we are a community of political exiles, and in other parts of the country we are seen as “wetbacks” and “illegals” who have crossed a border to steal from the bounty of the citizens of the nation. In other parts of the country again we remain an invisible community relegated to the forgotten pockets of any large city, communities riddled with crime and despair. In still other parts of the country we are little more than arms that pick the fruits or vegetables or prepare the chickens or cut the beef we find in any supermarket. And in yet other parts of the nation Latinas, the familiar nannies, engage in raising children they did not give birth to while always longing to be home and hold the ones they did. It seems as if we, the Latinas/os in the United States, embody a series of contradictions; for example, some of our ancestors lived in what is now the United States long before there was such an entity, yet we remain outsiders. We pick the fruits and vegetables that grace some of the most expensive tables across the nation (we provide the elements for the intimate act of eating), we raise children from very wealthy families (we provide the care for the intimate act of childrearing), yet we somehow remain outsiders. Some of us have for generations contributed to the nation’s development by working to construct cities across the nation or by fighting in wars, yet we continue to be seen as usurpers. Some of us no longer use Spanish as our foundational language, yet folks are surprised that we speak English without an accent.

Some of us are of African descent, yet folks are surprised when our identity is tied to another history of the African reality in the Americas. So it is not surprising that the question “And where are you from?” is still being asked of Latinas/os.

But there is another level to the question “Where are you from?” because at its core the question is about the role and power of whiteness in the history of the United States, especially in the southwest borderlands, the place of the first encounter between whites from the southern confederacy and Spanish-speaking Mexicans in the early 1800s. In these early encounters race was an important factor for the North American settlers, who at first were surprised and then repulsed by the *mestizaje* (mixture of blood; intermarriages between Mexican, Africans, Indians) of the Tejanas/os they encountered. What we see happening is the delineation of a white identity constructed through social comparison in which whiteness is not only normative but defined in opposition to color. As a result nonwhite people are identified as outsiders, inferior, and they are also objectified so that they become the depositories of the hate and fear felt by whites. It should be noted that in the case of the late nineteenth-century Protestant missionary enterprise to the Spanish-speaking people of the southwest and the Caribbean, the objectification of the Latinas/os encountered by the missionaries created a missionary ideology, as seen in missionary correspondence and denominational reports, that sought to “lift up” the Tejanos or the *puertorriqueños* or the *cubanos* who were identified as needing both civilization and Christianization.

Latinos are a *mestiza* people and their *mestizaje* is a reality that is not limited to only racial hybridity. The term *mestizaje* is a multivocal one that can be also used to describe other realities of life for the Latino community. Latino *mestizaje* is also about the hybrid reality of belonging and not belonging; about centers and margins; about national identity and national rejection; about how others see the Latino community and how they interpret their existence. I am talking about the many ways Latinas/os cross borders in their everyday lives in the United States in order to survive. Latinos are daily border crossers who must learn early on to interpret life on both sides – life in the dominant culture and life in the Latino community. This is how we learn to survive and how we are able to be who we really are. And it is in this very paradox of belonging yet not really belonging that the history of Latinos begins to be understood, not just nationally but within our own denominational histories, as Protestants and as Roman Catholics. It is also where we need to begin our analysis of what this paradox implies for the twenty-first-century United States as the entire nation faces a “browning” of the country that cannot be stopped. The numbers tell a compelling story: the US Census Bureau projects that “by 2060 the Latino population would more than double, from 53.3 million in 2012 to 128.8 million. Consequently, by the end of the period, nearly one in three U.S. residents would be Hispanic, up from about one in six today” (US Census Bureau. 2012). Ed Morales calls this “multinational multiplicity”:

Latino culture has never been developing in a hermetically sealed area South of the Border ... It has been evolving directly through massive migrations, which energize the Latino populations that have already been living in the U.S. ... This rapid transfer of

information via commodities and media images, and the back-and-forth lifestyles of transnational Latinos, are central to the postmodern experience. (Morales 2002: 19)

Yet despite this browning that is taking place, Arturo Madrid, writing about race and the Latino community, says that we are still in a particular place in the national consciousness. Madrid says:

The U.S. communities labeled Latino are a diverse set of populations whose roots grow deep in the soil of the United States. Their members, however, have not either as individuals or as a collectivity ever been considered part of the “imagined community” of this nation. We have been consistently defined out ... That is the subtext of the question all Latinos are asked: And where are you from? We are not perceived as being “from here.” Rather, we have been considered to be a “foreign other,” regardless of our individual or collective histories. Moreover, our imagined “otherness” is shaped by deep-rooted images and stories concerning our ancestors and ancestry ... We have been imagined and we have been found wanting. (Madrid 2001: 100)

Are You *Latino*? Or Is It That *Hispanic*?

The question “Where are you from?” is linked to the question of how to name ourselves once we enter the United States if we are immigrants, or as we interact with the Euro-American world around us, if we are born here. Richard Rodríguez, who was born and raised in California in the 1960s and identifies as a Chicano, has written about this external push to name our community and why we encounter this process with hesitation and even rejection. I think that in Rodríguez’s writings we can find a connection between national history, national memory, and how they intersect and shape Latina/o life in the United States, ultimately affecting how Latinas/os are imagined in the US.

When I was a boy it was still possible for Mexican farmworkers in California to commute between the past and the future. The past returned every October. The white sky clarified to blue and fog opened fissures in the landscape. After the tomatoes and the melons and the grapes had been picked, it was time for Mexicans to load up their cars and head back into Mexico for the winter. The schoolteacher said aloud to my mother what a shame it was the Mexicans did that – took their children out of school. Like wandering Jews, Mexicans had no true home but the tabernacle of memory ... The schoolroom myth of America described an ocean – immigrants leaving behind several time zones and all the names for things. Mexican-American memory described proximity ... My father knew men in Sacramento who had walked up from Mexico. There is confluence of earth ... There is [also] confluence in history. Cities, rivers, mountains retain Spanish names. California was once Mexico. (Rodríguez 1992: 48–9)

Rodríguez is telling us about how life north and south of *el río grande* is really a continuation, so while the border is a reality for the Border Patrol and for the Department of Homeland Security, the Mexicans remember that they never moved. The border was

forcibly moved in an act of military violence, and overnight, in 1848, Mexicans had to choose between leaving their homes and all that was familiar to “return” to the newly configured Mexico, or stay in what was familiar but become strangers in their own land. Rodríguez also connects the land to history and history to memory, yet this memory has been reimagined. This is what he says about the immigrant experience:

The best metaphor of America remains the dreadful metaphor – the Melting Pot. Fall into the Melting Pot, ease into the Melting Pot, or jump into the Melting Pot – it makes no difference – you will find yourself a stranger to your parents, a stranger to your own memory of yourself. (Rodríguez 1992: 161)

Gloria Anzaldúa, Tejana feminist, talks about the Latina/o presence as a “blind spot” for the dominant culture because of the Latino refusal to just “melt” into the Melting Pot:

I am visible – see this Indian face – yet I am invisible. I both blind them with my beak nose and am their blind spot. But I exist, we exist. They’d like to think I have melted in the pot. But I haven’t, we haven’t. (Anzaldúa 1987: 86)

Pat Mora, Chicana poet and writer, also deals with the issue of identity as she describes her own experience of borderlands life or what Cuban professor Gustavo Pérez Firmat has called “life on the hyphen.” It is worth noting that even though Pérez Firmat is writing about the experience of the “1.5 Generation” of Cubans, those who came as children or adolescents to the US, it is an experience also shared by other Latino groups (Pérez Firmat 1994). This is how Mora describes this “life on the hyphen” for the Mexican American:

Able to sit in a paneled office,
drafting memos in smooth English,
able to order in fluent Spanish
at a Mexican restaurant,
American but hyphenated,
viewed by Anglos as perhaps exotic,
perhaps inferior, definitely different,
viewed by Mexicans as alien,
(their eyes say, “You may speak
Spanish but you’re not like me”)
an American to Mexicans
a Mexican to Americans.

(Mora 2000: 82)

Fernando Segovia, New Testament scholar at Vanderbilt University, has described this reality of Latino life in the United States as being “the eternal Other.” The Latino community in North America is both citizen and foreigner, it has been conquered and

colonized, and in many ways is still not fully embraced. The Latino community in the United States is an imagined community, and by this I mean one that has been created or imagined by those outside our community, by those who have the power to name. Let me give you an example: the term “Hispanic” as a racial category was developed in the 1970s for purposes of the census. It is a political creation, a way to describe difference in race and culture. Prior to the invention of the term “Hispanic,” all persons living in the United States who came from a Spanish-language culture were categorized as “Caucasian.” But now all this has changed, and as a result of the creation of this new category by the federal government the only place in the world where “Hispanics” exist is in the United States. And so the Latino community lives with an ambiguous and imprecise, externally imposed label, “Hispanic,” which is basically an ideological construct specific to the “political and daily life of this nation, to its past ideological self-image and identity as a ‘melting pot’ of immigrants ... [which] continues to reinforce how foreign people of Latin American descent continue to be ... regardless of the time and mode of their incorporation into the United States or their subsequent status as citizens” (Oboler 1997: 31–2). That is why the issue of identity, whether it is how the Latina/o self-identifies or how she or he is identified by the dominant culture, continues to be a key issue in borderlands life, whether in Oregon or Kansas or New York City, or Texas.

This is how Richard Rodríguez describes the creation of the term “Hispanic”:

“Hispanic” is not a racial or cultural or a geographic or a linguistic or an economic description. “Hispanic” is a bureaucratic integer – a complete political fiction. How much does the Central American refugee have in common with the Mexican from Tijuana? What does the black Puerto Rican in New York have in common with the white Cuban in Miami? ... Think of earlier immigrants to this country. Think of the Jewish immigrants or the Italians ... German Jews distinguished themselves from Russian Jews. The Venetian was adamant about not being taken for a Neapolitan. But to America, what did such claims matter? ... A Jew was a Jew. And now America shrugs again. Palm trees or cactus, it’s all the same. Hispanics are all the same. (Rodríguez 1992: 70)

Rodríguez is reminding us that despite the fact that Latinos are a mosaic of pigmentation, a grand and diverse mosaic that is the reality of our cultures, once we enter the shores of “America,” we share a common history and we are imagined by the larger culture in particular ways that make us into an undefined mass. In her book *This Bridge Called My Back* Gloria Anzaldúa says this about the external imagining of who Latinas/os are: “Who, me confused? Ambivalent? Not so. Only your labels split me” (Anzaldúa 1983: 205). The Latino history is in many ways similar to the story of all immigrants, but it is also different in very particular ways. In reality, Latinos never stopped being “foreign” to the Euro-American citizens of the nation. That is why to talk about race in the US is to talk about more than just the black-and-white racial dichotomy. This is how sociologist Suzanne Oboler explains it:

The struggle for Mexican-Americans and Puerto Ricans for civil rights and equality before the law has necessarily taken a different form from that of the African-Americans,

precisely because, at least since the Civil War period, the exclusion of blacks has not been couched in distortion stemming from xenophobic portrayals of them as foreign born. Indeed, the experiences of Mexican-Americans and Puerto Ricans in the United States (legally fellow citizens since 1848 and 1917 respectively) exemplify the ways xenophobic nationalism and domestic racism have been conflated since the early nineteenth century. (Oboler 1997: 41–2)

As a result the Latino has been historically imagined as Other, foreigner, non-native even if that Latino was born in the continental US. This is an example of domestic ways of excluding, but to help you visualize the power of being imagined in this way, let me share with you a court case that dates back to 1896. Ricardo Rodríguez, despite the guarantees of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, was denied his final naturalization papers. Rodríguez went to court. “[I]n making their case against Rodríguez ‘the authorities argued in court that Rodríguez was not white nor African and ‘therefore not capable of becoming an American citizen.’ ... they wanted to keep ‘Aztecs or aboriginal Mexicans’ from naturalization” (Oboler 1997: 42). Here we have a clear example of how the national imagination, played out in the court system, supported the exclusion of Mexicans who not only lived on US soil, but had been guaranteed the right to citizenship by the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo.

Here we see how domestic exclusion had been based on the racial understandings of the dichotomy in which black and white are seen as *the* (perhaps only) legitimate racial categories for the nation. This national understanding of race served to reinforce the idea of nationhood and nationality which has rendered “Mexican-Americans [and Puerto Ricans] invisible both as citizens and as native-born members of the nation” (Oboler 1997: 42). And so we are outsiders, the “eternal Other,” the native-born foreigner.

Historical Imagination: The Need to Remember

To think about history as “imagined” or “constructed” is one way to help us better understand how external or imposed categories of difference lead to the marginality and exclusion of a community. Historian Emma Pérez says this about the critical/reflective/interpretive process of historiography:

If history is the way in which people understand themselves through a collective, common past where events are chronicled and heroes are constructed, then historical consciousness is the system of thought that leads to a normative understanding of past events. Historical knowledge is the production of normative history through discursive practices. (Pérez 1999: 7)

What this means is that the historical discourse does not in essence necessarily produce new information, nor does it provide new knowledge about the past, since both the information and knowledge about the past already exist as a precondition for the writing

of history. What the historical discourse does do is to produce very specific *interpretations* that are developed from the information and knowledge the historian has access to. These interpretations then become the substance of the historical narrative that is used to shape national identities.

Important to this process is the fact that the only way of accessing any history is through language, and language is itself a social category that is constructed and shaped by means of the relations of power among humans, that is, by domination and subordination, in any given culture. In other words, language itself is always filled with a pre-existing content that seeks to interpret the world and is at the same time shaped by that world. This means that as the historian progresses from the archival work, or the research, to the historical narrative, or the writing of the story, she or he takes the facts and must necessarily interpret them, give them meaning. And this meaning (or interpretation) can never be truly objective or free from the “assumptions, practices, and rhetoric of the discipline” (Scott 1999: 2) or from the social location of the historian (gender, class, race, age, education, religion). These are the interpretive lenses which filter all historiography, and what I am suggesting is that when we analyze historical narrative we must recognize that it is often very difficult to distinguish *what* is said from *how* it is said.

That is why Emma Pérez identifies an historical consciousness as the process which is used to create a “normative” history, or what church historian Martin Marty has called a “usable past.” It is how humans understand and interpret themselves as subjects of history. It is the self-understanding of a person or of a group or of a nation. In a very real sense, I understand this consciousness to be a type of historical imagination that takes facts and constructs a complex historical narrative that is about the past but is also much more. The historical imagination is an interpretive lens the historian cannot disown and which is used to shape identity, especially national identity. And this process is never static but continues to evolve as people and nations reimagine themselves. This complex national historical narrative of the United States is today defined by historians as exceptionalism, but how was this exceptionalism formed?

Enrique Dussell, Latin American historian, seeks to answer this question by uncovering the philosophical and theoretical assumptions that are used to construct historical consciousness, in this case how Eurocentrism is constructed. Dussell examines Eurocentrism because one of its primary productions is a very clear definition of Other. Dussell finds that there is an intellectual legacy that flowered in the Enlightenment which gave life to the idea of a clearly defined “center of history.” He begins his analysis with Kant’s 1784 essay “Answering the Question: What is Enlightenment?” in which Kant says: “Enlightenment is the exit of humanity by itself from a state of culpable immaturity ... Laziness and cowardliness are the causes which bind the great part of humanity in this frivolous state of immaturity” (Dussell 1995: 19-20). At the core of what Dussell is arguing is that in the development of a modern Western European historical consciousness the concept of a “center of history” is essential. This “center of history” assigned England, Germany, and France as core nations, true bearers of what Hegel calls the “world Spirit” (Dussell 1995: 24), while Spain, Portugal, and Italy are

defined as peripheral nations. The importance of this for Dussell is that if Spain was itself seen as a nation peripheral to this original "center of history," then the Americas, the people who lived here before the arrival of the Western Europeans, and the Spanish empire that developed were relegated to an even more peripheral status. And to show how entrenched this idea of a "core of history" still is, Dussell quotes Jürgen Habermas, who wrote in his 1987 lectures titled *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*: "The key historical events for the implantation of the principle of subjectivity are the *Reformation*, the *Enlightenment*, and the *French Revolution*" (Dussell 1995: 25).

This statement is important to our analysis because it is this historical consciousness that has served as the theoretical foundation for the creation of the national history of the United States. More importantly, it also shaped how Anglo Americans thought about those they encountered who were foreign to them in the varied colonizing enterprises in which they participated – the Native peoples, the Africans, the Mexicans of the southwest, the Puerto Ricans, the Cuban, the Filipinos, the Hawaiians. Like the Western Europeans before them, the writers of the national history of the US continued to use the same categories of core/periphery, superior/inferior, and continued to use race and religion as determinants for the worth of the Other and her or his culture. They made the United States the subject of history for the entire Western hemisphere, while the other peripheral or marginal people remained the objects of a history of conquest, colonization, and enslavement. That is why even today when people say "America", with the capital "A," everyone knows they are *only* talking about the United States. US citizens are *the* Americans with the capital "A," despite the reality that Central Americans, South Americans, the Caribbean, and Canada also make up the Americas, that their citizens too are Americans.

The focus here is not only on the truthfulness of the historical story but also on the way that story *imagines* people and nations; how it "constructs heroes"; how that history imagines and then gives value to the Other; how it uses language to tell that narrative within the complex reality of human relations of power, of domination and subordination, of conquest and colonization. And in this very process of historical imagination, which is all about the historical construction of identity and worth, we find that specific borders have also been created. These borders are created through the use of categories that define and assign difference; these borders are social and political constructions that use the language of difference to separate as well as to exclude and devalue. Historian Joan Wallach Scott argues that "positive definitions depend on negative, indeed imply their existence in order to rule them out" (Scott 1999: 59). It is this very language of difference, with its many layers of meaning, that has produced the well-known historical dichotomies such as superior/inferior, strong/weak, winner/loser, civilized/savage, blessed/cursed.

The same scenario was played out in the takeover of the Mexican territories by the United States in the nineteenth century. The colonization of Texas is a clear example of how this type of thinking is put in place in order to create the "clean slate" necessary to the national myths of the US. By devaluing Roman Catholicism and seeing it as mere superstition, it became much easier for Stephen Austin to falsely pledge allegiance to the

Roman Catholic government of Mexico when he entered the northern borderlands of the territory then known as Coahuila y Texas. The historical record clearly shows that the first Euro-American settlers, who in the early 1820s moved into what is today Texas, not only displayed little respect for Roman Catholicism but were just as demeaning toward the *mestizo* people they encountered. The *mestizaje* of the Tejanos, the mixture of indigenous, African, and Spanish blood, was believed by Austin to produce a people who were inferior, depraved, incapable of governing themselves, and sexually promiscuous. In a letter to his sister, Austin wrote, "To be candid the majority of the people of the whole nation as far as I have seen them want nothing but tails to be more brutes than the apes" (Weber 1988: 157).

Perhaps all of this history seems far distant from the diverse world we live in, from the fact that the US has elected an African American president, that this nation today wears the badge of multiculturalism as a means to show that Americans (with a capital A) have moved into a new day. But is this really so? There are many who think these racial ideas of superior/inferior, this national exceptionalism that has given power and privilege to one race at the expense of other races, is still very much alive, though in new, more sophisticated forms. One such voice is that of sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, who writes about what he calls the new ideology of "color-blind racism" which is the idea of "racism without racists." For him, this "sincere white fiction" belies the fact that still today in the twenty-first-century United States, "racial considerations share almost everything in America." Which leads him to ask, "how do whites explain the apparent contradiction between their professed color blindness and the United States' color-coded inequality?" (Bonilla-Silva 2010: 2). For him, the nation has developed a new way for dealing with race:

Much as Jim Crow racism served as the glue for defending a brutal and overt system of racial oppression in the pre-Civil Rights era, color-blind racism serves today as the ideological armor for a covert and institutionalized system in the post-Civil Rights era. (Bonilla-Silva 2010: 3)

Why is it important for us to seriously take into account this reality as we look at the history of Latinas/os in the US? Because we need to tell our stories, we need to remember our histories, and then we need to put that history into the context of a nation that would have us forget, a nation that has institutionalized the systems that will force us to forget by shaming, by excluding, by denying opportunity, by keeping us invisible, yet making it seem that it is all about the failures of us as individuals and as a community. Forgetting who we are and where we came from and why we came is the highest price any Latina or Latino can pay for becoming an American with the capital "A." Consider what James Baldwin said about becoming American: "The making of an American begins at that point where he himself rejects all other ties, any other history, and himself adopts the vesture of his adopted land" (Baldwin 1984: 29). This is a high cost to pay for belonging. But when we remember our history, Latinas/os can reaffirm that we are already American. So while Latinas/os may not be identified as white nor as black by the

dominant culture, we also do not “wallow in a pool of nothingness” (Morales 2002: 20). As journalist Ed Morales reminds Latinas/os, we “are not defined by negation, we are the celebrators of contradictions, the revelers in the thorniness of the human condition, the slayers of category” (Morales 2002: 20). And it is by remembering our varied histories and our common history that we are emboldened to be freed “from the guilt of having to reconcile to a strict definition of identity.” (Morales 2002: 21). I return again to Morales’ understanding of a “Spanglish culture” to talk about Latinos. He says:

So if Spanglish culture is characterized by the multiplicity of its racial and class identifications, then its implications for identity politics in the U.S. are enormous. [Because] at the root of Spanglish is a very universal state of being ... it’s a new blow against the tyranny of outward personal appearances, a personal map of possibilities ... The world of Spanglish is the world of the multiracial individual. We live in a crowded universe of multiracial I’s. (Morales 2002: 7–9)

Mapping the Latino Future

I believe that knowing and understanding the history of the Latino community in the United States is directly related to the liberation and empowerment of Latinas/os. I say this because I believe that to continue to accept the new forms that this American exceptionalism (color-blind racism) has taken in the recent past, as in the debates about bilingual education or the debates about affirmative action or the debates about the militarization of the Río Grande border, or the debates about immigration, is to uncritically accept this history of exclusion and rejection and to internalize it. By not engaging in a critical analysis of our historical location, we lose awareness of the systemic use of racism in the courts, the corporations, the government, the schools of the US and we feel that the failure is ours, within ourselves and our communities. When we allow others to use the criteria of progress as the only way to measure the worth of a person or a group of people, which is deeply ingrained in US society, and to simply dismiss those who do not measure up as useless or inferior, we Latinas/os become part of the problem. The danger here is that this attitude will not allow us to see with clarity how interconnected we all are. There can be no understanding of the slavery issue without also understanding the results of the mass killing of indigenous people in the Caribbean by the Spaniards years before there was a slave trade in the Western hemisphere. There can be no understanding of border issues and immigration without critically examining the political and military maneuvering of the United States government as it engaged in war with the unstable government of the newly formed *República de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos*. To fully capture the meaning of Castro’s influence in the Caribbean and throughout Latin America there is the need to also examine the foreign policy of the United States, not since the 1960s, but at the beginning of the twentieth century. The Spanish–American War of 1898, the warning to Simón Bolívar, Latin America’s most famous liberator, by the James Monroe government in the 1820s to stay out of the Caribbean, the making of Puerto Rico into a colony: all these historical realities had to

do with a US political worldview that was fed by the earlier notions of exceptionalism that provided the historical imaginary to find the Spanish-speaking Americans inferior neighbors. So if today we still believe this deeply engrained worldview has been significantly transformed, then it is necessary for Latinos to critically engage the history of the Americas as well as the history of Latinos in the US.

The time has come to use the learnings from our collective journey, our shared history, and begin to imagine ourselves. The history of the Americas is the history of Latinas/os, and it is the complex story about more than five centuries of interactions of a diverse group of people who as a whole make us who we are today in the US. And if remembering is empowering, it is because to remember means we must also face our own dark history, our own failures and our own imaginaries, those we packed in our suitcases when we came to the country, those we were given by our parents.

So what are some crucial steps that the Latino community needs to consider as it maps its future in the United States? Let's begin with some positives, and one major positive is that we already are a multiracial people/community in a nation still struggling with a limiting and limited biracial worldview. As Morales reminds us, "Because U.S. Latinos are descended from a multicultural, that is, a large group of mixed-race people, we are positioned to be the primary proponents of America's future" (Morales 2002: 8). Because of the great miscegenation that happened in the Spanish-speaking Americas and the fact that Spain was already considered "Europe's dark cousin" (Morales 2002: 10), the countries of all of our origins have a different racial reality. While it is true that the countries of the Southern Cone of Latin America, Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay have rejected their indigenous and African roots, as Morales argues, Latinos are still very much a hyper-miscegenated people. We are also a people who have a very close familiarity with *la lucha* (the struggle) – whether as part of a political revolution in our native countries or in the struggle to survive in the context of the US. There is a tenacity to the struggles of all our Latino communities that includes a history of activism that has refused to give in to the push toward invisibility and colonization. Such was the thrust of Rodolfo (Corky) Gonzales' poem "I am Joaquín":

Lost in a world of Confusion,
Caught up in a whirl of a
gringo Society ...
I am the masses of my people and
I refuse to be absorbed.
I am Joaquín
My faith unbreakable
I am Aztec Prince and Christian Christ
I WILL ENDURE!

(quoted in Morales 2002: 81–2)

While Gonzáles' poem is representative of the activism of the 1960s within the Chicano community, echoes of the themes of identity and of *la lucha* can also be found

in today's Latino music. One young rapper from Los Angeles, Jae-P, has a song, written by Cecilia Brizuela, called "Ni de aquí, ni de allá" ("Not from here, nor from there") that is an expression of what is called Urbano Regional, a mixture of hip-hop and Mexican culture. A song that talks about life that is from both sides of the border but ultimately from neither one because of the rejection by whites in the US and by Mexicans, it expresses an awareness of the nomadic journey and dual identities of all Latinos, young and old, who live in the US today, and the anticipation of survival and triumph. The chorus makes this statement:

porque no soy de aquí ni soy de allá
 pero aquí es donde me gusta y aquí me voy quedar
 porque no soy de aquí ni soy de allá
 con dos acentos en la lengua llegaré a triunfar
 (because I am not from here and not from there
 but here is where I like it and here is where I'll stay
 because I am not from here and not from there
 with two accents on my tongue I will triumph)

The triumph that is anticipated will happen within the reality of this duality of identities, using the two languages as tools. This song captures Morales' idea of "life in Spanglish" in which there is "no demonization of the hyphen, no self negation of being on the border" (Morales 2002: 20), and shows "the interaction of U.S. Latinos reaching back to their past and new immigrants grasping for their future" (Morales 2002: 24).

So if Latino demographics pose a threat to the Anglo European, and the Latino community challenges the traditional biracial conversation and understanding of race, what will be the effect of the Latino population explosion on race in the US? I think that the vision of the country's racial future as posited by Bonilla-Silva can open the conversation and help the Latino community itself to rethink its own understanding of race. Bonilla-Silva rejects the predictions of the assimilationists and also rejects the predictions of balkanization made by Samuel Huntington. Huntington, who was a conservative political scientist and Harvard professor, wrote a book *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (2005) that proposes that the "American identity" is being eroded by the "absorption" of the large number of Latino immigrants. For Huntington, the issues common to the Latino community, such as its large demographics, historical presence, lack of citizenship, and bilingualism, represent a dissolution of the "American" identity, which is Caucasian, British, and Protestant. Bonilla-Silva goes in a different direction and argues that the biracial order found in the US will evolve into a

loosely organized triracial stratification system ... of 'whites' at the top, an intermediary group of 'honorary whites' ... and a nonwhite group or the 'collective black' at the bottom ... I hypothesize that the white group will include 'traditional' whites, new 'white' immigrants, and, in the near future totally assimilated white Latinos ... Japanese Americans, Korean Americans, Asian Indians, Chinese Americans. (Bonilla-Silva 2010: 179)

There are of course dangers to this racial vision of a US society, which Bonilla-Silva also presents, because while this new order “will be apparently more pluralistic and exhibit more racial fluidity than the order it is replacing, ... this new system will serve as a formidable fortress for white supremacy ... [and] will drown the voices of those fighting for racial equality (‘Why continue to talk about race and racism when we are all Americans?’)” (Morales 2002: 179). If we suppose this triracial society does indeed develop, what will it mean for the Latino community? Here is where we come to the negatives or dark side of the US Latino reality and history.

Social scientists have long acknowledged the reality of Latino fragmentation. Cultural theorist Silvio Torres-Saillant “cautions us to proceed carefully lest we make facile assumptions about Latino homogeneity and internal unity. Latinos, he claims, import with them the structures and habits of racial privilege, including deep-rooted Negrophobia, and anti-*Indio* sentiment” (Suárez-Orozco and Paz: 2002: 213). How could we, shaped by the racial worldviews of Spaniards (“dark cousin” though Spain may have been to England, Spaniards were still “cousins” and still shared a sense of European/white superiority to the indigenous people and to Africans), deny that our community has to deal not only with its own struggles with racism but also with classism and with machismo? In addition to having to confront and deal with issues of race within the Latino community, there is the additional burden related to issues of anti-immigrant sentiment among native-born Latinas/os. Consider these statistics from the report by the Pew Hispanic Center dated August 16, 2005:

- 60 percent of the native born support laws that prohibit the unauthorized from getting drivers’ licenses, versus 29 percent of the foreign born.
- 28 percent of the native born think that immigrants are a burden on the country rather than strengthen it, versus 5 percent of the foreign born (Suro 2005).

Whatever our feelings and reactions to these statistics, whatever the reasons why we think we see these kinds of responses, the reality is that “people can *always* alter the course of history through their actions. People can indeed make their own history” (Bonilla-Silva 2010: 236). And the Latino community can begin this necessary mapping of its future by confronting its own prejudices and fears, realizing that “the head-in-the-sand denial of racial disharmony” (Morales 2002: 295) among Latinos will get us nowhere. There is work to be done among ourselves as we honestly seek to understand how those imagined ideas about ourselves, produced externally and then imposed by a highly racialized Anglo American society, have been internalized, and we must deal with the damage done by this internalization. We must seek to leave the borders of our micro-histories – as *cubanos*, *nuyoricans*, *colombianos*, *dominicanos*, *tejanos*, Chicanos, *hondureños*, *venezolanos* – so we can engage and see the importance and beauty of our macro-history as US Latinas/os. We cannot let the borders of race, class, and gender created by Spanish colonization and by North American colonization continue to separate us. The Latino community needs to get to that place where “the border ... will

with away, and everywhere will be the border and nowhere will be the border. There will just be America, the New Old World" (Morales 2002: 297).

And to do this we begin by remembering. By remembering that "both the Puerto Rican and Cuban flags were designed in New York by pro-independence exiles" (Morales 2002: 41) and that dreams of freedom can be dreamt anywhere. We need to remember that we, Latinos, are more than we seem. We are more than illegals and political exiles, and we are more than our national identities. We are *the Americas* and we are here, in this place, in this context, and in all of our veins can be found the blood of people of all colors and races. *Nosotros, todos, somos americanos.*

I am a human being
Of multiracial and multinational
Ancestry.
The loveliness to come.
Embrace my song, lose yourself
In my tropical jungle.

Salvador Agrón
(Morales 2002: 61)

Note

I will use the term "Latino" to talk about the large and very diverse community of native-born and immigrant women and men who have a Spanish surname and a connection to any of the countries from Central America or Latin America, or to Mexico, or to Cuba, Puerto Rico, or Santo Domingo. Though "Latino" is gender specific (male), when I refer to the community I will use it as gender neutral: "the Latino community." When I speak about women (Latinas) or men (Latinos) I will use the term "Latina/o" as an inclusive term, embracing all genders.

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CHAPTER 3

Sources and *En Conjunto* Methodologies of Latino/a Theologizing

Rubén Rosario-Rodríguez

In the North American context, US Latino/a theology stands as a vibrant example of a contextual theology in critical discourse with the dominant modern (and postmodern) paradigms, articulating an alternative form of Western Christianity in which the particularities of culture are respected, yet no single cultural manifestation of Christianity becomes normative for all Christians. Recognizing the diversity of methodological approaches, even within a relatively small movement like Latino/a theology, this chapter introduces critical issues raised by recent reflections of US Latino/a theologians on theological method, identifies some of the chief contributors to this discussion, and synthesizes major points of agreement for a distinctively Latino/a methodology over against the dominant European and North American anthropological and revelational models.

Every theologian – whether implicitly or explicitly – employs a distinct methodology in the reading, interpretation, and contemporary application of sacred texts and traditions. The discipline of theology, broadly defined in St Anselm's classical affirmation as *faith seeking understanding*, guides Christian reflection on the Word of God and the Christian tradition by establishing criteria for identifying and evaluating sources, and for determining what authority past doctrinal formulations still have for present and future theological construction. At the same time, questions of theological method can expose seemingly irreconcilable fault lines between different Christian traditions, highlighting the historical brokenness of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.

Within the Western Christian tradition, two distinct methodological approaches came to dominate the theological landscape in the twentieth century, under whose long shadow all contemporary efforts at theological construction still stand: (1) the *anthropological* approach embodied in Paul Tillich's theology of culture (Tillich 1951, 1991a, 1991b), and (2) the *revelational* approach originating in Karl Barth's critical retrieval

of orthodoxy (Barth 1936–69, 1968, 1991). In Tillich’s analysis, the “theologian of culture” begins with an examination of the historical and social context of the believing community, then seeks to ascertain the meaning of God’s message for the present human situation through a method of correlation by which the universal concerns of the human condition find expression in the particular symbols of the Christian faith. By contrast, the “church theologian” eschews the particularities of human culture, focusing primarily on God’s message as revealed in Scripture (and to a lesser extent, the Christian tradition), before addressing the culture in which the church is located. The critique raised by the anthropological model about the revelational approach is that it perpetuates a “supra-naturalist” theology in which Scripture stands outside of culture, thus shielded from criticism by culture,¹ while the critique of the anthropological approach by more church-centered theologians is that, in its efforts to make the Christian faith relevant to culture, theologies of culture undermine the uniqueness of God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ.²

Following World War II, theological discourse between these two dominant approaches became so fragmented that consensus over theological method appeared unattainable, a situation compounded by a historical shift in global Christianity in which the church in Europe and North America faced increasing secularization and decreasing cultural relevance, while Africa, Asia, and Latin America underwent a Christian resurgence (Robert 2000; McGrath 2002). These demographic changes within world Christianity underscored the fact that, despite methodological differences, both anthropological and revelational schools of thought are located within the Western, primarily European and North American, intellectual tradition, and both are responding to the post-Enlightenment atheistic rejection of Christianity manifested in the works of Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and Friedrich Nietzsche (Feuerbach 1957; Marx 1978a, 1978b, 1978c, 1978d; Freud 1955, 1961, 1975; Nietzsche 1989, 2007). Therefore, while the dominant theological traditions of Europe and North America had, until recently, played a normative role in the doctrine and practice of world Christianity, the emergent theologies of the late twentieth century in Asia, Africa, and Latin America – as well as marginalized theologies within Europe and North America – have resisted the hegemony of Western academic and ecclesial discourse by articulating contextual and local theologies that reject the notion of a singular Christian tradition.³ By affirming that particular experiences, cultural contexts, and traditions of interpretation play crucial roles in theological construction,⁴ nascent theological movements like US Latino/a theology ably demonstrate how the driving concerns of Europe and North America – atheism and secularization – are not necessarily top priority for the majority of Christians in the world.

Methodological Concerns of Latino/a Theologizing

While the Hispanic presence in North America predates the founding of the United States, Latino/a theological voices within the church and the academy have been marginalized – even silenced – for much of this history. Thus, while properly located

within the Western Christian tradition, US Latino/a theology has emerged as a critique from the margins questioning historically, culturally, and ethnically dominant forms of Christianity. The growth of the US Hispanic population has transformed North American religion. Latino/as now represent over 35 percent of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States, with two-thirds of Latino/as (68 percent) identifying themselves as Roman Catholics (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life and the Pew Hispanic Center 2007). The second largest group is evangelical Protestants, who comprise an estimated 15 percent of the US Hispanic population. Bolstering the claim that atheism and secularization are not primary concerns for Latino/a theologizing, less than 8 percent of Latino/as in the United States identify as not belonging to any religion. Given that over 90 percent of Latino/as self-identify as Christian, with less than 1 percent of the Hispanic population self-identifying with Judaism, Islam, or other world religions, this investigation's analysis of Latino/a religion of necessity focuses primarily on the Western Christian theological tradition.

Cuban historian and theologian Justo L. González argues that whatever form Latino/a theology takes, there is within its discourse an implied critique of both modernity and postmodernity: "We are those whom modernity colonized, those whom the colonial powers saw as objects of modernization, those whose metanarratives were assaulted and suppressed in the name of the great modern metanarrative. We are those who must still believe in the metanarrative that justice shall prevail and the crooked will be made straight" (González 1996a: 347). Roberto S. Goizueta makes a similar argument, praising postmodernism for its greater openness toward religion, but suspicious of its irrational undermining of all truth claims: "Is it mere coincidence that, just when U.S. Hispanics, African Americans, and Native Americans – so long excluded from the world of rational discourse – are engaging in a rational, *critical* way the dominant culture and its intellectual elites, those same elites throw up their hands and declare all intellectual arguments to be irrational?" (Goizueta 1999: 147 [emphasis in the original]). While postmodernism affirms that all ethical and religious perspectives have a place in the public arena, in practice the views of politically dominant groups become normative for all, while those historically excluded from the centers of power remain marginalized and disenfranchised. Consequently, Goizueta posits the preferential option for the poor as the *necessary precondition* for authentic pluralism, arguing that "as long as there are poor persons there can be no pluralism" (Goizueta 1999: 173).

Liberation theologies set aside all pretense of "impartiality" by arguing that Christians are called to make a preferential option for the poor because in the Scriptures God acts on behalf of the weak and abused of human history; this reading of Scripture leads the church to make political commitments in solidarity with the oppressed, seeking the historical transformation of oppressive situations and social orders. Epistemologically, liberation theology recognizes that all theological reflection is highly contextual – inevitably intertwined with the interests and desires of a particular culture, ethnic group, or social class – and cautions that theological traditions have been used to legitimate oppression. Therefore, there exists a methodological commitment to a "hermeneutics of suspicion" as a check upon the tendency of ideology and tradition

to distort truth. In the North American context, the theological voices of US Latino/a theologians provide an alternative to the dominant epistemological perspectives within the academy and the church. The experience of marginalization has led Latino/a theologians to build coalitions and work in solidarity to articulate a collaborative, ecumenical, and multicultural theology. This movement, called *teología en conjunto* (“theology done jointly” or “as a group”), models an inclusive, discursive method of doing theology distinctive of many Latino/a church communities. It is characterized by the gathering together of theologians, pastors, and lay people (often in ecumenical cooperation) to reflect on the beliefs and practices of the people they serve, producing a theology that truly belongs to, and is validated by, the faith community.⁵

In order to facilitate a discussion of US Latino/a methodological contributions it is useful to identify certain recurring themes within the work of Latino/a theologians that locate this movement at the margins – yet still within – the Western Christian tradition. First, avoiding the dominant dichotomy between anthropological and revelational approaches, US Latino/a theology identifies *revelation* – understood as God’s self-revelation – as the primary source of Christian theology. Specifically, the ultimate source of Christian faith and Christian doctrine is the man named Jesus, and what is known about him through the witness of the New Testament. Implied in this affirmation, however, is the recognition that the Scriptures are not the *unmediated* Word of God, but a *human* witness to the revelation of God in the man Jesus, called the Christ of God. Thus, while the New Testament is a reliable – even inerrant – witness to God’s historical self-revelation, “the same cannot be said for any interpretation of the Bible” (González 1996b: 12). Such a liberative reading “takes the Bible into its own hands and away from those in control of the present order, reading it from its own perspective rather than from the perspective of the powerful” (Segovia 1992: 43).

Second, US Latino/a theologies affirm the role of *culture* as an important source for theology. The Christian faith is preserved in the collective memory of the people of God in solidarity with the historical witness of the New Testament, embraced as the foundational, normative narrative about the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. However, this witness does not stand outside or above culture, but is revealed in the midst of culture. In other words, there is no irreconcilable gap between God’s act of self-revelation and humanity’s capacity to understand and obey this revelation. For revelation, “in order to be claimed as revelation, must also be a human cultural event” (Espín 2014: 19). Accordingly, the Incarnation becomes a central doctrine for Latino/a theology: “God encounters us through humanity, acting in its midst. Hispanics identify deeply with Jesus, not because of his divinity, but because of his humanity. In Jesus, God takes on a face of flesh and bone. Such a God we can understand; and we know that he can understand us, too” (Pedraja 1999: 62). The hermeneutics of liberation that inform and guide US Latino/a theology discloses an intimate relationship between the God of the Bible and the people of God such that the people encountered in the Bible are not historically or culturally distant but are received as “fellow sufferers, fellow pilgrims or sojourners, fellow visionaries” (Segovia 1992: 49).

A third locus of Latino/a theologizing centers on *popular religion*, the concrete religious practices of the people of God arising independently of church teaching and discipline, often in resistance to the institutional church. Consequently, Latino/a theology affirms not only the Scriptures and church tradition as reliable sources of God's self-revelation, but also the popular beliefs and practices of the laity as vessels for the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:1–13). Latino/a Christianity is indelibly shaped by the Iberian Catholic conquest of the New World in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Therefore, an important resource for understanding Latino/a Christianity is the syncretistic religious practices of the people of Latin America that combine the Christian symbols and rituals of the Iberian Catholic conquerors with indigenous forms of spirituality as well as African religions. Ultimately, despite tensions between popular religion and official tradition, a dialogical relationship exists between church hierarchy and the people, through which Latino/as have “managed to preserve and re-interpret significant elements of their shared worldview” while also disseminating “many of the doctrinal contents of popular Catholicism, though sufficiently adapted (*and* concealed) in forms acceptable to the modern ecclesiastical realities” (Espín 1997: 141[emphasis in the original]). In great part because of the attention given to popular religion as a distinct source for theology, Latino/a theologians critically engage those academic disciplines that facilitate and inform the study of popular religious practices, such as ethnography (Ada María Isasi-Díaz), political science (Gastón Espinosa), sociology (Milagros Peña), and philosophical hermeneutics (Orlando O. Espín).

While US Latino/a theology has consistently critiqued culturally dominant Christian traditions, Latino/a theologians also affirm the normative role of *tradition* in Christian theology. As demonstrated by its emphasis on popular religion, US Latino/a theology occupies the “borderlands” between official church structures and popular practices, yet Latino/a theologians struggle to affirm both their inherited confessional commitments and their distinctly Latino/a forms of piety. Again, a hermeneutics of liberation informs Latino/a theological reflection on tradition reception, with the understanding that what is transmitted as tradition “is what one Christian community, though not necessarily another, decided was more important or indispensable. All Christian communities, aware of it or not, choose what they think is most necessary from a wider pool of contents witnessed and traditioned to them by others” (Espín 2014: 9). Latino/a theology concedes the interested perspective of every theological tradition and encourages inter-subjective conversation as a corrective against the tendency to universalize particular points of view, defining theology as inherently communal and discursive. Thus, Latino/a theology is methodologically committed to intercultural dialogue for attaining maximal understanding between different peoples about how to read and interpret God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ.

A fifth and final concern of Latino/a theologies is its commitment to *liberative social ethics*. Christian ethics from a Latino/a perspective begins with the preferential option for the poor: an intentional act of solidarity with, by, and for the poor, marginalized, and disenfranchised in society. It should be noted that the term “preference” in the phrase “preferential option for the poor” is not used by theologians to mean the primary

dictionary definition of “preference” as “favor shown to one person or thing over another or others.” Rather, the language of the Latin American bishops’ statement at Medellín (1968) employs the legal definition of the term, meaning “a prior right or claim to something” (*Oxford English Dictionary*). In other words, the use of the word “preferential” is not intended to mean that God loves the poor more; rather, because of their immediate and undeniable suffering, the church must give *priority* to the needs of the poor. Not only does this faith commitment entail a critique of the dominant political and economic structures, it also questions the dominant European and North American paradigms governing the academic and public conversation on pressing social issues. The problem with this dominant discourse is that it perpetuates the metanarrative that there exists a supposedly color-blind, universal, and objective ethical norm. Such hermeneutical naïveté fails to account for the dominant perspective’s own biases and prejudices, or its role in marginalizing – even repressing – minority views. However, “marginalized communities of color have long recognized that no ethical perspective is value free. The subjectivity of Eurocentric ethical thought can be lifted by the academy to universal objectivity because the academy retains the power to define a reality that secures and protects their scholastic privilege” (De La Torre 2010: xi). Striving for concrete and attainable social justice, Latino/a theological reflection on social ethics begins by naming *la realidad* (“reality”) through an interdisciplinary analysis of the social, historical, and cultural context of Latino/a Christianity grounded in *lo cotidiano*, the day-to-day life experience of Latino/as attempting to live the Christian Gospel in a society still defined in terms of racial, gender, economic, and ethnic inequalities.

Justo L. González: Reading the Bible “in Spanish”

Justo L. González, an ordained Methodist minister, historian, and theologian, stands as one of the chief progenitors of Latino/a theology in the United States. His vast theological corpus has been described by Allan Figueroa Deck, SJ, as the most cogent statement of Latino/a theology to date, and his systematic theology, *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (1990), undertakes a critical reading of the Bible, theology, and Christian tradition from a distinctly Latino/a perspective. While this major work critically engages such early church doctrines as creation, the Trinity, and Christology, its most vital contribution is the articulation of a distinctly Latino/a biblical hermeneutics – what González calls reading the Bible “in Spanish.”

González’ theological method has a two-pronged point of departure: (1) the socio-historical context of Latino/as in the United States, described as a community “in exile,” and (2) the trend in global Christianity to resist European and North American hegemony by articulating contextualized theologies committed to liberative social transformation. As the theology of an exiled people, *mañana* (literally “tomorrow”) theology is grounded in hope – not an eschatological, future-directed panacea – but hope as a motivating, God-given promise to work with humanity for a more just tomorrow. Consequently, as the theology of an alien and exploited people trapped in a daily struggle

for survival, Latino/a theology defines liberation in concrete historical terms with tangible social change as its goal. However, this commitment to transformative social praxis does not merely arise from within the Latino/a experience of marginalization and exploitation, but is interwoven into the Latino/a reception of the Christian biblical tradition. In *Mañana*, González challenges all Christians to learn to read the Bible “in Spanish” – not literally in the Spanish language – but figuratively through the lens of Latino/a experience (González 1990: 84–7), because the social context of many biblical narratives mirrors contemporary Latino/a experiences of dislocation and exile (along with the social injustices that accompany such conditions). In other words, Latino/a readings of the Bible “in Spanish” resonate with God’s preferential option for the poor and marginalized as illustrated in the Exodus narrative, the prophetic literature, and the preaching of Jesus, mainly because the liberative dimension is *already* present within the biblical canon as a core component of God’s self-revelation.

González’ reading of the Bible “in Spanish” identifies four distinct hermeneutical strategies: (1) given the obvious political dimension of so many biblical texts, theologians need to address issues of power and powerlessness; (2) given that biblical texts were intended for public liturgical and instructional application, the Bible ought to be interpreted in the context of a living community of faith; (3) given the simplicity and accessibility of the biblical texts, the interpretation of the Bible is not the domain of the intellectually and culturally elite, but belongs to the whole people of God; and (4) given the emphasis of the divine imperative – God’s preferential option for the poor – encountered in a Latino/a reading of the Scriptures, it becomes necessary to read the whole of the Christian tradition “in Spanish.” Thus, when the church embraces a reading of the Bible from the perspective of an exiled community, it can overcome the temptation to manipulate the reading of sacred texts in implicit support of an unjust status quo and enact the biblical imperative for justice and peace in all human affairs. Such a liberative reading also resists the dominant academic and ecclesial narratives that claim objective detachment and universality of truth claims by emphasizing the perspectival nature of all biblical interpretations. González writes, tongue in cheek, “White theologians do general theology; black theologians do black theology. Male theologians do general theology; female theologians do theology determined by their sex” (González 1990: 52).

As one of many marginalized and exploited populations in the world, Latino/as are answering the biblical call to work toward a new and radically different *mañana*. Yet Latino/a biblical hermeneutics offers a non-innocent reading of history, fully aware that throughout human history the exploited can quickly turn into the exploiters, and affirms in its place a theology of the Cross that acknowledges human sinfulness and views social transformation as God’s work for human liberation. Reinterpreting the Christian tradition from

a perspective and experience of marginality tells the church that bringing the marginalized to the very center of God’s love and God’s community is an essential part of the gospel of Jesus Christ – so essential, that the doubt arises: In a society and a world in which so many

are marginalized, is it legitimate for a church to call itself at the same time both “mainline” and “Christian”? (González 1996b: 55)

Orlando O. Espín: Revelation as Human Cultural Event

The tension between anthropological and revelational approaches in contemporary theology is most evident when describing the relationship between Christ, as God’s ultimate self-revelation, and culture, as the historically bound locus of revelation. It would be a mistake to reduce Christ to culture, but it is equally problematic to remove Christ from culture.⁶ Catholic theologian Orlando O. Espín affirms the necessity of Christ revealed *through* culture: “All human reality is historical *and* cultural. All that is human and all who are human occur and live always within culture, and cannot ever be a-cultural. Culture, therefore, is a context we cannot avoid or even imagine to escape. We are only and always in culture” (Espín 2014: 44). Among liberation theologies, it seems almost cliché to stress the inevitability of culture when discussing theological method. However, despite the proliferation of contextual theologies in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, dominant theologies within the academy do not always acknowledge that the human experience of God, and consequent interpretations of that experience, always occur within a particular cultural context. Theological reflection, therefore, needs to account for the role of culture not only in the interpretation of Scripture and the reception of theological traditions, but also in the very composition, redaction, and canonization of the Bible itself: “It is in this diverse and inescapable context of cultures, of history, of experience (of God’s self-revelation and self-donation), of hope, and of faith, that the texts of the New Testament were written, collected, and trusted as hermeneutical response of the People to God’s revelation” (Espín 2014: 19). Accordingly, the lived experiences of the people, their faith, their liturgy, and their social praxis become rich sources for theological reflection, for it is through such communal experiences that God is encountered and within which all theologians struggle to understand the mystery of God.

Given this identification of human cultures as the medium of divine revelation, Orlando Espín has written at length on popular religion and interprets the Catholic doctrine of *sensus fidelium* as “faith-full” intuition: “Christian people *sense* that something is true or not vis-à-vis the gospel, or that someone is acting in accordance with the Christian gospel or not, or that something important for Christianity is not being heard” (Espín 1997: 66). Recognizing that the *sensus fidelium* is always expressed in and through human cultures, and that all human cultures are capable of misunderstanding God’s revelation, Espín identifies three criteria for evaluating the “faithfulness” of any popular expression of Christian faith: (1) Does it exhibit fundamental coherence with the Scriptures? (2) Is it in basic agreement with the normative decisions embodied in the creeds, doctrines, and general traditions of the “official” church? and (3) Regardless of cultural location, does it embody certain indispensable aspects of Christian social praxis (i.e., the proclamation and practice of justice, peace, liberation,

reconciliation, and so on). The latter emphasis on *orthopraxis* over against *orthodoxy* most differentiates Espín's theological work from the magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church, as evident in his monograph *Idol and Grace: On Traditioning and Subversive Hope* (2014), a critical retrieval of the Western Catholic tradition for socially transformative faith.

For Espín, taking the idea of revelation seriously means that the community called into existence by this act of divine self-giving recognizes that its very origin is an event in the past, while simultaneously affirming that the historically mediated encounter with the Jesus event is not just a deposit of facts. By affirming the primacy of God's act of revelation in *Idol and Grace*, Espín argues that the Christian tradition does not just consist of narratives about the historical man Jesus that have been preserved and passed down through the ages that we now strive to imitate. Rather, affirming that faith and tradition have their genesis in a divine act of revelation – an act of empowering grace – means that the encounter with tradition is a sacramental encounter with Christ himself. To paraphrase the Gospel of John, Jesus did not just preach the truth, he did not just model the truth for our benefit, Jesus IS the truth.

Fundamentally, this means that God's act of revelation is not an abstraction, but is *always* culturally concrete and specific. The Exodus narrative not only describes the historical liberation of the people of Israel by God after years of slavery in Egypt, it also prescribes the response in faith to God's actions, delineating how a community liberated by the living God ought to live. Like the Exodus for Judaism, the life of Jesus of Nazareth is the historical, generative event between God and the People of God prescribing specific patterns of belief and behavior for the Christian community. According to Espín, the core of the Christian tradition ought to be understood in terms of God's compassion, for "Without its center in compassion, Christian traditioning would be eviscerated of its meaning" (Espín 2014: 124). Furthermore, this divine compassion is most directly observable in the historical Jesus event:

If we take seriously the reality of Jesus of Nazareth, and especially the reality of those whom he mainly addressed and with whom he lived (other villagers, often poor and landless, abused and dismissed by the powerful, the learned, and the pious of their day), then today's Christian traditioning cannot, in the name of Jesus, disregard the poor, the abused, and the insignificant of the twenty-first century. (Espín 2014: 124)

Espín's critical retrieval of Catholic Christianity in light of a christology of compassion and subversive hope remains Catholic insofar as the church – the *popular* church – is defined in terms of resistance to the *institutional* church. However, while emphasizing the role of the laity in preserving and traditioning the core Christocentric tradition of compassion and subversive hope, Espín still locates apostolic succession within the episcopal office, provided "the subversive hope announced by Jesus remains at the core of the episcopal ministry" (2014: 32). This tradition of radical Christian compassion, though central to any historical reconstruction of Jesus of Nazareth, has never been widely embraced within Christendom. Therefore, a faithful

retrieval of Christian tradition is an exercise in subversive memory best viewed as a transformative *counterculture* in critical dialogue with dominant ecclesial and secular cultures.

Ada María Isasi-Díaz: Popular Religion and Liberative Praxis

Despite the efforts of *teología en conjunto* to foster a diversity of perspectives (30 percent female membership in the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians in the United States), few Latina theologians have had the impact of Ada María Isasi-Díaz, a Cuban-born Roman Catholic theologian best known as an ardent advocate of *mujerista* theology.⁷ With her passing in 2012, her legacy is defined as much by a series of challenging publications as by the memory of her activist spirit, which led her to preach regularly at the defunct Our Lady of Angels Church in East Harlem until a few weeks after she became terminally ill, working with the Women's Ordination Conference for the ordination of women as Roman Catholic priests. The work of Isasi-Díaz is a clarion call for all people – although she speaks first to women – to struggle for self-determination and social transformation, in whatever social context they find themselves, in solidarity with all who are marginalized and exploited, in obedience to the Gospel's vision of universal human liberation.

While Orlando Espín's body of work represents a more thorough and systematic analysis of popular religion, specifically popular Catholicism, popular religious practices prove an even more important theological source for Ada María Isasi-Díaz given her focus on the daily struggle for survival of Latina women. Isasi-Díaz contends that the resources for liberating praxis are found in the community's traditions and religious beliefs; however, popular religious practices gain their authority not through any official recognition by the magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church, but only insofar as they contribute to the community's historical liberation. In her own words, "Hispanic women's experience and our struggle for survival, not the Bible, are the source of our theology and the starting point for how we should interpret, appropriate, and use the Bible" (Isasi-Díaz 1996: 149). While Latino/a theology prioritizes "a canon within a canon" by emphasizing key liberative texts, the theology of Isasi-Díaz subsumes the authority of the canon under the rubric of liberation: "from the start we can say that a *mujerista* biblical hermeneutic submits the Bible to a Latinas' liberative canon. This means that the Bible is to be accepted as part of divine revelation and becomes authoritative for us only insofar as it contributes to our struggle for liberation" (Isasi-Díaz 1996: 150). Accordingly, Isasi-Díaz understands divine revelation as ongoing, not "completed and closed when the canon of Christianity was determined," but taking place "through the faith and religiosity of the poor and oppressed of this world" (Isasi-Díaz 2001: 137–8). In other words, the praxis of liberation manifest in the popular faith of marginalized peoples becomes the very basis upon which to select a canon.

Though "liberation" is not the only theme found in Scripture, it is a theme that resonates throughout the Scriptures; from the Psalms to the Prophets, the Exodus to the

Magnificat of Mary, it is impossible to read the Bible without acknowledging that the God revealed in the Bible is a God who sides with the powerless over against the abusers of power. Therefore, while Isasi-Díaz can be criticized for relying too heavily on extra-scriptural sources without direct engagement of biblical texts, this aspect of her theological method merely bears witness to her unrelenting commitment to human liberation; her commitment to Christian ethics practiced in the struggles of daily life. A deeper analysis of Isasi-Díaz's problematic claim that a "great number of Latinas do not consult the Bible" in their daily lives, but find help "in praying to God and the saints: God, Mary, the saints – all part of the divine – to whom Hispanic women have the direct access they do not have to the Bible, which needs interpretation," reveals a profound organic connection between the Bible and the lived spirituality of a people (Isasi-Díaz 1996: 149). *Mujerista* theology exposes the disconnect between the daily lived struggle of Latinas and the sometimes oppressive ways in which the Bible has been used by the church to perpetuate relationships of domination and control against women. Nonetheless, devotional practices such as praying to the saints or Mary have a rich and complex history, drawing upon both Christian and non-Christian sources. The fact that they remain alive within a Christian context implies that on a fundamental level these experiences are not alien to but compatible with the Gospel.

Popular religion is the manner in which the process of conscientization and self-determination is incarnated, and within which most Latino/as encounter God's revelation. While Isasi-Díaz does not articulate an explicit doctrine of the Holy Spirit, through the *sensus fidelium* she links the unfolding of the "kin-dom" with the work of the Holy Spirit. According to Isasi-Díaz, this emphasis upon the prophetic task of the faithful "does not assert the inerrancy of the faithful apart from the hierarchy. Nor does it provide, I believe, for the inerrancy of the hierarchy apart from the faithful unless the hierarchy considers itself as separate from the People of God" (Isasi-Díaz 2004: 146). However, those aspects of the canon and the tradition that contribute to human liberation "are accepted as revealed truth" (Isasi-Díaz 1998: 274). *Mujerista* theology affirms the importance of a Spirit-led, two-way critical conversation between the magisterium and the people of God as demanded by the doctrine of *sensus fidelium*. Consequently, Isasi-Díaz's work yields an understanding of theology that concludes with the assurance that wherever we find the work of liberation, *there* we find the presence of the Holy Spirit. For most Latino/a theologies, that charism resides in the popular beliefs and practices of the people.

Roberto S. Goizueta: Christ Our Companion

US Latino/a theology contributes a thorough critique of the dominant Christian traditions. Still, most Latino/a theologians make efforts to locate Latino/a theology within the Western Christian tradition. Cuban American theologian Roberto Goizueta navigates the straits between a liberative repudiation of the most repressive aspects of the institutional church and full participation in the church's liturgy and sacraments: "As a self-consciously

Catholic theologian, however, I theologize from within the context of the larger Roman Catholic tradition as this is lived out in our Hispanic communities” (Goizueta 1999: 8). While there is a deep respect for the broader Christian tradition, there is also a hermeneutical awareness that cultural and political factors influence the transmission of the Christian faith, and historical situations can and do arise in which the interpretive traditions of the culturally elite are imposed as normative for the whole of the Christian tradition.

Goizueta reflects on this complex relationship between culturally specific, popular forms of religion and the broader transcultural and transhistorical appeal of Christianity:

If the lived faith of the Christian community (what has traditionally been called the *sensus fidelium*) is the key locus of God’s revelation in history, the central function of popular Catholicism as an expression of that *sensus fidelium* calls for a reexamination of the relationship between the official tradition and the popular traditions of the church – what Alejandro García-Rivera has called the relationship between the “Big Story” and the “little stories”. (Goizueta 2009: 54)

Though the act of interpretation always takes place within a specific tradition and in a particular social location, it also incorporates perspectives from without through intercultural dialogue between conversation partners who do not always share the same interpretive framework. For Latino/a theology the main conversation partner is Western Catholic Christianity, which, notwithstanding the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, has failed to fully appreciate the importance of popular practices in the prayer and worship life of most Catholics. Despite the institutional church’s resistance to popular religion, however, Roman Catholic Latino/as are making efforts “to appreciate more fully the role of Eucharistic worship as essential and central to that life while, at the same time, resisting the tendency to reduce worship to Eucharistic worship” (Goizueta 2009: 54–5).

This willingness by many Latino/a theologians to incarnate their catholic faith as part of the institutional Roman Catholic Church stems from the very popular beliefs and practices the institutional church so often resists, such as the Guadalupe Marian devotion, or Holy Week re-enactments of Christ’s Passion: “It is no accident, therefore, that the crucified Christ plays such a central role in Latino/a popular Catholicism” (Goizueta 2009: 9). As implied by the doctrine of the *sensus fidelium*, by the power of the Holy Spirit there is a unity and constancy between the proclamations of the magisterium and the lived faith of the people; a faith whose focal point is the crucified and risen Christ. The faith manifest in Latino/a popular Catholicism is grounded in a sacramental encounter with the crucified Christ who accompanies believers in their struggles: “Jesus is, first of all, a flesh-and-blood human being who is with us today” (Goizueta 1999: 67). Resting on the knowledge that Christ is our companion through this life and into the next, “the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ are thus interpreted not only as events in the life of the individual Jesus Christ but as events in the life of Jesus Christ as the head of the community he founded,” so “what the resurrection embodies is not simply the victory of individual life over death, but the victory of communal life over

estrangement, the possibility of reconciliation in the face of abandonment” (Goizueta 2009: 28). To belong to the church is to participate in the body of Christ, which in the analysis of Latino/a theologies cannot be reduced to Eucharistic participation, but involves “participation in the lives of those peoples who are themselves crucified victims, those whose wounded bodies are the mirrors of our souls” (Goizueta 2009: 23). Thus, so long as the institutional church – despite all its shortcomings – embraces this ministry of compassion and accompaniment among the most powerless and destitute, believers are assured that Christ is present in the church.

Miguel A. De La Torre: Latino/a Social Ethics

In *Latina/o Social Ethics: Moving Beyond Eurocentric Moral Thinking* (2010), ethicist Miguel A. De La Torre suggests a new direction for Hispanic liberative ethics: a subversive praxis of cultural and political resistance called an ethic *para joder*. Employing the Spanish verb *joder*, a not-too-polite colloquialism that translates as “to screw with,” De La Torre encourages the disenfranchised to mess with the powers that be as a way of destabilizing unjust power structures and exposing institutionalized white, male, Eurocentric privilege. An ethic that prioritizes destabilizing the status quo through satirical social commentary – in which a “trickster” figure such as Juan Bobo in Puerto Rican folktales exposes societal hypocrisy through his childish innocence – is a desirable component of nonviolent political resistance. De La Torre finds inspiration in biblical “tricksters” such as Abraham or Jacob who employ deception as a means of self-preservation, arguing that even Jesus employs an ethic *para joder*, insofar as Jesus’ preaching destabilized the status quo through his use of parables, placing him and his followers in conflict with the reigning religious and political powers.⁸

Christian ethics from a Latino/a perspective begins with an intentional act of political activism on behalf of the marginalized and oppressed; such activism is grounded in the lived experience of Latino/a communities through the academic theologian’s active involvement in the community of faith: “This keeps ethical analysis real and practical, because it focuses on the struggle against the dehumanization and disenfranchisement of Latina/os” (De La Torre 2010: 77). In other words, theology done *en conjunto* implies mutual accountability between the Latino/a theologian and *la comunidad* (“the community”). In *Latina/o Social Ethics*, De La Torre accentuates the prophetic dimension of the theologian’s vocation by challenging Latino/a communities to revisit their traditions with a more critical eye, not out of disrespect to those Latino/a theologians that preceded him, but as a catalyst for renewed social activism stemming from a faith commitment to liberation and the preferential option for the poor. As Latino/as become more integrated into the North American cultural mainstream it becomes harder to claim to speak from the margins. De La Torre’s comments remind Latino/a theologians that living in solidarity with the poor requires accompanying the poor in their daily struggles, which entails personal risk and professional sacrifice.

Preserving the basic human dignity (*dignidad*) of all persons as creatures made in the image of God (*imago Dei*) leads Latino/a theology to criticize the dominant socioeconomic structures. While supporters of neoliberalism (economic and social policies that emphasize free trade and relatively open markets) argue that globalization has improved wages and working conditions for workers in underdeveloped nations, detractors contend that the exploitation of weaker nations by the first world has led to a widened economic gap between developed and underdeveloped nations, has contributed to environmental degradation, and, when factoring for inflation, has actually resulted in reduced workers' wages. Trade liberalization has also triggered the commoditization of human labor through the mass exportation of migrant laborers. While a Latino/a ethical response to globalization is not necessarily adverse to capitalism, an ethic that espouses universal human liberation cannot allow corporate profits to supersede preserving basic human dignity.

Liberation theology's preferential option for the poor remains relevant in today's world because, in spite of the economic gains of neoliberal policies, the dehumanizing and lethal effects of global poverty remain. Christian social ethics born from the margins of Latino/a experience in the United States attacks the root causes of economic injustice; the unchecked consequences of neoliberal economic policies work against the liberative goals of the Latino/a community. By looking closely at the everyday reality of Latino/as in the United States, De La Torre challenges Christians to engage in ethics *en conjunto* by seeing economic realities through the eyes of the marginalized, in order to articulate concrete social praxis that can transform oppressive situations.

Conclusion

This brief overview of some major themes and innovations of US Latino/a theology provides markers for constructing a distinctly Latino/a theological method. US Latino/a theologies tend toward a liberationist methodology and praxis, but even those not explicitly liberationist still nurture a liberative ethos. Hispanic theologies also demonstrate a commitment to the interdisciplinary analysis of social reality in order to expose how existing social structures perpetuate racist, sexist, and classist agendas. They share an emphasis on the lived experience of the believing community, a communal social praxis grounded in liberation, and a biblical hermeneutics that questions dominant power structures while privileging the perspective of the oppressed. This commitment to a "hermeneutics of suspicion" leads US Latino/a theologies to reinterpret the history of Christianity as the history of many local traditions rather than the history of one monolithic tradition. Furthermore, the experience of biculturalism – navigating the space between life as a marginalized minority and the deep-rooted sense of belonging to the one catholic church – suggests that Latino/as, while subjected to marginalization, exclusion, and exploitation on the basis of ethnicity, are also spiritually at home within the mainstream of the Western Christian tradition. The implications for theological method are clear: by conversing with the plurality that is the Christian tradition, past *and* present, along with critical perspectives from non-Christian sources,

US Latino/a theology attempts to avoid provincialism and dogmatism and remains open to all potential avenues of God's revelation. Yet within these shared *loci communes* ("common places"), this burgeoning movement also reveals itself as a complex and varied mosaic.

Notes

- 1 In the North American context, "theologies of culture" influenced by Tillich's correlational method include Tracy (1981); McFague (1982); Ruether (1993); and Kaufman (1993).
- 2 North American proponents of a Barthian, church-centered theology include Frei (1975); Lindbeck (2009); and Hauerwas (1994); also see Wright (2012).
- 3 A sampling of the various theological movements resisting European and North American domination include Latin American liberation theology, black liberation theology in the United States, feminist theology in Europe and North America, African theology, Korean *minjung* theology, and Latino/a theology in the United States. See Gutiérrez (1988); Alves (1972); Segundo (1976); Hennelly (1990); Cone (1997, 2010); Wilmore and Cone (1979); Daly (1968, 1973); Ruether (1993); Williams (1993); Johnson (1992); Ela (1986); Boesak (1984); Kyung (1990); Elizondo (2000); González (1990); and Isasi-Díaz (2004).
- 4 For an introduction to the issues regarding the contextual character of theology see Bevans (1992: 11–22); and Schreiter (1985: 1–21, 75–94).
- 5 This movement was born through the collaborative efforts of US Latino/a theologians in professional organizations such as *La Comunidad* of Hispanic American Scholars of Theology and Religion (American Academy of Religion), the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States (AHTUS), *Asociación para la Educación Teológica Hispana* (AETH), and the Hispanic Theological Initiative (HTI). *Teología en conjunto* (also called *teología de conjunto*) was the theme of a major conference sponsored by AHTUS called *Somos un Pueblo* ("We Are A People") and held at Emory University in June 1990, resulting in the publication of a highly influential collection of essays, *We Are A People!* (Goizueta 1992). In 1995 a group of Protestant Latino/a theologians, pastors, teachers, and students gathered at Princeton Theological Seminary; the proceedings were published in the volume *Teología en Conjunto: A Collaborative Hispanic Protestant Theology* (Rodríguez and Martell-Otero 1997). The spirit of *teología en conjunto* is perhaps best embodied in the ecumenical cooperation of the Hispanic Summer Program (HSP), an annual intensive summer workshop where Latino/a students, pastors, lay persons, and professors of theology and religion gather at different member institutions to reflect theologically on the challenges facing the Latino/a church.
- 6 See Niebuhr (1951) for a classic paradigm of the various ways in which Christianity responds to and interacts with culture: Christ against culture, Christ of culture, Christ above culture, Christ and culture in paradox, and Christ transforming culture.
- 7 *Mujerista* theology has much in common with North American feminist theology, yet like the womanist movement among African American feminists, *mujerista* theology recognizes that the experience of Latina women is mired within patterns of poverty, racism, and sexism that Anglo feminists may fail to recognize. Isasi-Díaz describes *mujerista* theology as a Hispanic women's liberation theology that, while acknowledging the influence of its intellectual and spiritual forebears, critiques both Latin American liberation theology and

North American feminist liberation theology for not properly considering the perspectives of persons marginalized according to race as well as gender.

- 8 De La Torre's subversive praxis shares common ground with Walter Wink's *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way* (2003), in which Jesus calls us to transcend both passivity and violence by finding a third way, one that offers resistance to injustice yet is nonviolent. This third way is demonstrated in Wink's creative reinterpretation of Jesus turning the other cheek as an act of cultural defiance against oppressive masters.

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CHAPTER 4

The Ecumenical Narrative and the Latino/a Experience

José R. Irizarry

Ecumenism is one of the main efforts engaged by the Church to construct its fiction of universality. As fiction, the ecumenical effort plays a role akin to that of political rhetoric, a spoken and practiced narrative that faith communities tell themselves to define, delimit, and organize their ideal state of being in the world. So foundational is the fiction of universality for the Church that it envisions the religiously fragmented world we inhabit as a “common world,” the shared *oikou-mene* at the center of our social imaginary.¹ I am aware that the committed reader may be lessening her interest in following an argument that starts by depicting a traditional ecclesial practice as fictional. Nevertheless, it is important to establish that describing this sought-after condition of Christian unity as fiction does not in any way diminish its theological importance and practical desirability.

In “fictionalizing” the topic under consideration, this author attempts to point to two main conditions of the ecumenical effort. In the first place, this effort continually entails an *imaginative construction* of a desire (unity) that does not emerge naturally from history’s endemic development and the way that Church tradition evolves within it. In other words, we continue to forge the language and practices of ecumenical relations in contravention of the historical diversification and fragmentation of Christian communities. In the second place, the ecumenical practice has a *narrative character* that fits a recognizable grammar and structure in that it drives a concept of unity that is worked out from the center (where doctrinal statements, confessional declarations, and relational policies are discussed and decided) to the periphery (where the *sensus fidelium* shapes the daily practices of faith). In his interpretation of what he considers to be a common suspicion in Latino/a Christians of the ecumenical narrative, Methodist theologian Justo González (1997) establishes that

this center–periphery grammar is in place when “the most sophisticated and higher-class partners in such a dialogue will manage to maneuver the conversation to their advantage,” while “the lower class Latino and Latina Christians will be blindsided” (González 1997: 82). As the argument goes, this suspicion is not gratuitous “when one takes into account the fact that most of the official ecumenical dialogue takes place among denominations whose membership is at least middle class, and which look down at the types of Christianity that are more prevalent among Protestant Latinos and Latinas” (González 1997: 82–3).

Aversion to ecumenical relations, as it is narrated in the foundational fiction of Christian denominations, does not mean that an elaboration of ecumenical practices is absent or that there is no prospect of shaping Christian unity from within the religious experience of Latinos/as. It is precisely this fictional approach to the treatment of ecumenical dialogue and relations that will allow a retelling of ecumenism from the Latino/a perspective and, therefore, provide a new model of Christian unity that emerges from a culturally distinct social imaginary and that can potentially reverse the grammar of *center–periphery* ecumenism. Consequently, attending to the Latino/a imaginative construction of faith, and to the narrative character of Latino/a cultural experience, its syntax, metaphors, and cadence, may illuminate novel approaches to Church unity. Furthermore, it can promote, in the context of a struggling and waning ecumenical movement, what Justo González (1997) as well as Miguel De La Torre and Edwin Aponte (2001) have termed a “new ecumenism.” In this chapter I will endeavor to argue that the Latino/a faith experience can invigorate this new ecumenism as it embeds in the Church new storytellers, new metaphors, and a new language. The contribution of the Latino/a faith experience is not yet another truth claim to reconcile with the larger narrative of a unified faith, but its own fictional perspective on Christian thought and life.

New Storytellers: A Good Story Is Better Told *en conjunto*

La comunidad (community) is the place where the stories of the Latino/a experience are naturally embedded. Communities are fueled by relational practices that rarely need interpretation or overt verbal expression. People within the community know their particular role and social script, and operate in view of such shared expectations. Unity of purpose and direction is a precondition for the sustainability of community. It is this pre-reflective sense of unity that builds community, and while the community seeks to live to strengthen that unity, it is preceded by it. Here the common syntax of traditional ecumenical thought, where ecumenism is engaged as the action of diverse communities seeking unity, is reversed. In this traditional perspective, the existence of the community precedes unity, for the ecclesial community can exist with Church unity as a panacea rather than a constitutive essence of its being. A main reason the ecclesial community can stand without a fundamental claim to visible unity is that its identity is already assumed theologically as the *Corpus Mysticum* (Murphy and Asprey 2008).

As Christ's body, the Church is already *membered*, the functions of the members already determined and community formed by that single narrative. No particular agency is needed in constructing that foundational unity; what is sought is a second-order unity, the visible unity of the diverse ecclesial communities of the universal Body of Christ divided by tradition and creed.

In contrast to this understanding of the Christian community as essentially constituted, the Latino/a community is not assumed a priori, for there is no single narrative that obligates people whose traditions and histories are diverse, who speak a common language with vast linguistic variations, and who claim plural cultures and ethnicities to come together under the socially constructed label of the North American Hispanic.² In the Latino/a community we find that narrative reality that Zygmunt Bauman (2000) observed operating in the culture of late modernity: "the end of univocity." While the voices of Latino/a culture are diverse, it is the mutual recognition of comparable social conditions, a communal immigrant consciousness, and a shared spiritual heritage that impel the desire for unity from which a community consequentially emerges.

When a community assumes its unity as a precondition for community, it is not necessary to negotiate meanings and worldviews in order to experience community. In other words, unity does not need to be *narrativized* through commonly accepted policies, joint declarations of belief, or mutually accepted ritual practices. This is the reason why, despite the existence of some level of mistrust among Latinos/as about the different languages of faith and the adequacy of certain doctrines and behaviors of ecclesial communities, ecumenism is worked out, even without been named as such, in the lived experience of the community or, as many Latino/a theologians prefer to call it, *lo cotidiano*. This reality is already evidenced in the daily life exchanges and imbrications between members of different Christian communities in the Latino/a culture for the sake of accomplishing political agency. By "political agency" I mean, as political theorist Hannah Arendt suggests, the work of representing ourselves in the public space as sociocultural actors with ethical responsibilities toward a shared world (Arendt 1958).

Roman Catholic feminist theologian Maria Pilar Aquino asserts this intrinsic form of ecumenism when she states that "what experience is showing us relates to an increasing tendency toward a strengthening of the ecumenical experience *desde abajo*, 'from the base', from the praxis of solidarity with the oppressed peoples and sectors that works to bring about a new people without borders" (Aquino 1995: 205). There is a plethora of grassroots social projects in which Latino/a Churches make joint efforts for the betterment of their communities through prayer and action. To list them would exceed the space allotted to this chapter. For now, it should suffice to mention that a significant representation of this form of active ecumenism was present in one of the most important civil right movements of the twentieth century, namely the fight of the United Farm Workers for humane living conditions for Latino/a residents and immigrants working on the agrarian fields. While the founder of the movement, César Chávez, was a faith-based leader grounded in the Roman Catholic tradition and informed by the social teaching of the Church (Wilson 2008: 179), he found important allies in a pan-Protestant group that joined the movement by forming the California Migrant Ministry

(Wells 2009). While the official history of the California Migrant Ministry focus on its Anglo-European leadership at the time most of the Anglo-European Protestant denominations debated the Christian witness of their work, it is crucial to point out that it was the mobilization of Latino/a Protestants that infused that ministry with authenticity. In fact, the social movement associated with the farmworkers in the United States' southwest brought a change in Latino/a ecumenism, as both Roman Catholic and Protestant Latinos/as began to jointly and openly support social causes (Barton 2006).³

This sort of practical and functional ecumenism has found its more narrative formalization in the work of Latino/a scholars of religion and theologians, where ecumenism is fostered by reflecting, researching, and writing *en conjunto*, in the attempt to signify the cultural preference for solidarity across denominational boundaries by modeling an *academic community*. This intentional reproduction of the inherent ecumenical sensibilities of Latino/a communities is not a simple act of cultural performance by Latino/a theologians, for they are characterized by their ongoing sense of commitment and accountability to those communities. Interestingly enough, that commitment has been primarily represented in the formation of, and participation in, ecumenical organizations of religious learning rather than in the written work.

The Hispanic Summer Program and the Hispanic Theological Initiative are two experiments in theological ecumenism that exemplify the commitment of Latino/a scholars toward concrete expressions of the Church. The Hispanic Summer Program, a "seminary without walls," seeks to prepare Church leaders who are cognizant of the singularities of ministering to Latinos/as. This program provides one of the few spaces where Latino/a emerging leaders of different Christian denominations can study and live together, experiencing the tensions, challenges, and possibilities of ecumenical unity. Students and faculty alike find common purpose in the need for a model of Christian service that is defined more by the distinctive and well-configured life situations of Latino/a communities than by self-contained ecclesial traditions. Ecumenism can benefit from that method of ministry that deliberately seeks to identify and understand the "limit situations" (Freire 1986) of communities bounded by specific linguistic, cultural, and political realities. Rather than promoting overarching statements *on* world poverty, *on* violence, and *on* social injustice, this method of *theology in ministry* can allow us to name, describe, and analyze the specificity of *this* poverty, *this* sort of violence, *this* form of injustice.

In turn, the Hispanic Theological Initiative was instituted as a mentoring program with the resolve to bring up a generation of Latino/a theologians that was, and continues to be, underrepresented in the circles where Church theology and doctrine, biblical interpretation, and ecclesial policy and practice are forged. By intentionally being both an interdisciplinary and an ecumenical program, it was preparing this new generation of scholars to serve across the boundaries of denominational identity, but with a clear commitment to research the Latino/a religious experience, and to embed the multicultural academic contexts they were preparing to serve with an alternative epistemology informed by that experience. Interestingly enough, traditional ecumenism has been distinguished by its multicultural character in that it has been always a global

endeavor. Yet rarely does a “shared” confessional declaration reflect epistemologies other than the dominant Western, Anglo-European approach to theological method. The ecumenical movement can be enriched by committing, mentoring, and giving center stage to a new generation of thinkers from the margins who are ineludibly trained to think from those margins.

When it comes to the institutionalization of Latino/a theology, one pivotal community is that of Hispanic Roman Catholic scholars gathered as the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States (ACHTUS). Since the focus of its work is community-minded scholarship, and aware that an essential interdependence between Roman Catholicism and the Latino/a communities cannot be claimed any longer, the Academy remains one of the few Roman Catholic institutions that deliberately engage Protestant colleagues in the development of a theological corpus (diverse but complementary) while remaining fundamentally and unapologetically a Catholic organization. This ecumenical approach is achieved by inviting and welcoming the contribution of Protestant scholars to the Academy’s peer-reviewed journal, the *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology*, and by encouraging the participation of these scholars as guests and presenters at the annual meetings of the organization. This inclusive approach to theological scholarship fostered by ACHTUS demonstrates that theological reduction may not be the price of ecumenical engagement. On the contrary, the continuous theological construction of one ecclesial tradition can be enriched by the reasoned contribution of another ecclesial tradition.

Initially conceived as an ecumenical organization, the Association for Hispanic Theological Education (AETH, from its Spanish name) became predominantly a Protestant organization seeking to create a space of intellectual dialogue among its members. As an organization in tune with the community it was called to serve, the Association started to recognize that an increasing number of Latino/a Christians were joining more evangelical and non-denominational Churches, and that in view of that reality, resources for the theological formation of this sector of the Latino/a community should be made available. In this form of intra-Protestant ecumenism, theological discourse evolves into direct service to local faith communities and their leaders, not in the form of top-down theological mandates to be followed, but in the form of collaborations between Church and academia as congregations are incorporated into the “theologizing” process that is usually delegated to Church scholars. The Association is partly responsible for the surge of interest in formal theological education that Pentecostal groups and non-denominational evangelicals have been demonstrating from the time of the Association’s inception. Moreover, as a religious group traditionally in favor of ecumenical dialogue, Latino/a Pentecostals have started to experience the most practical benefits of inter-Church relations as a result of their participation in the Association.

Lastly, it should be noted that much of the most comprehensive work on Latino/a theology has brought together the voices of scholars from diverse denominational traditions. These scholars have found cohesiveness, not in doctrinal and confessional consensus, but in the *practices* of shared reflection, mutual critique, and

intellectual support. On the basis of this approach to theological construction, one can say without fear of being mistaken that Latino/a ecumenical theology, whether historical, biblical, or systematic, is essentially a *practical theology*. Exceptional illustrations of this approach to theological construction are some of the following volumes; *Mestizo Christianity: Theology from the Latino Perspective* (Bañuelas 1995), *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology: Religion and Justice* (Aquino, Machado, and Rodríguez 2002), *Hispanic/Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise* (Isasi-Díaz and Segovia 1996), *Building Bridges, Doing Justice: Constructing a Latino/a Ecumenical Theology* (Espín 2009), and *New Horizons in Hispanic/Latino(a) Theology* (Valentín 2003). The work edited by Orlando Espín and Gary Macy, *Futuring Our Past: Explorations in the Theology of Tradition* (2006), is worth particular attention for two methodological reasons. First, it invites the participation of Protestant scholars (this author included) in order to reflect on Catholic tradition from the standpoint of the Protestant experience of that tradition. This models a form of theological ecumenism that is not a pastiche of contextualized readings of each theologian's tradition, but a truly inter-ecumenical dialogue that allows the interpretation and critique of one ecclesial tradition from the perspective of another. Secondly, the text was produced during prolonged days of round-table conversations in which intellectual interests and ideas were shared among authors as the text took shape. The method of theologizing *en conjunto* was tangibly employed in the production of a volume that in more traditional circumstances would have emerged from the desk of each writer after hours of solitary musings. If we agree that theology is the way we narrate our faith, and if faith is essentially a communal experience, our theology will be always a shared story. Ecumenical renditions of the faith story necessitate more than a renovated language: they demand new storytellers.

New Metaphors: When Home Meets the Diaspora

It is often said, in the anthropological analysis of the Latino/a social experience, that life at the borderland and the barrio does not lend itself to treatment within a linear narrative. This is the reason why Latino/a fiction attempts generally to convey, through non-linear and non-chronological narratives, the ambiguity of daily life and the cultural dualisms that surface as challenge to universals (Christie 2014: 12), even those doctrinal universals that ecumenism so anxiously seeks to find. Thus, the first contribution of the Latino/a experience to ecumenical dialogue is the assertion that it is in its fictional value that ecumenical efforts can find its most generative and practical propositions. After all, it has been particularly noted by Latino/a intellectuals that, excluded from the main narratives of historical representation, Latinos/as have used the means of fiction to tell their stories and to expose their worldviews in ways that challenge the axiomatic pretensions of history. To the point is Shari Stone-Mediatore's observation that this notion of "historical event" as a conclusive depiction of reality effectively excludes the resistant stories of the marginalized groups who are in need of re-narrating their agency in order to reconstitute a meaningful world (Stone-Mediatore 2003: 125–59).

One of the dominant pretensions of historical representation is the claim that the totality of human experience can be both grasped and interpreted from the singular perspective of an observer, independently of the location where he or she stands. Even in the more contextual depictions of Church history a degree of objective observation of reality is assumed. The objective view assumed by historical representation allows us to describe the particular while assimilating its complexity into a coherent and comprehensible worldview. The result of such a historical *assimilative perspectivism* is that an integrative view of the *oikumene*, the world we inhabit, is constructed at the expense of those who are not seen by the historian/spectator as she or he traces the cartography of this world. Already in the sixteenth century, in the longest epic poem written in Spanish, Juan de Castellanos' *Elegías de varones ilustres de las Indias*, the author renders invisible the conquered peoples of the Americas in his historical representation of the known world. In describing a world that remains inhabitable after the biblical flood, the poet affirms a history that belongs to a predetermined human group as he says: "but the dark earth given, to brute beasts and men, was since the flood split, into two almost equal parts: one never known nor seen except by its own natives" (De Castellanos 2004: 69)

Certainly, given the original restriction of the "known world" in Christian history to the geopolitical boundaries of the Roman Empire, the leading form of *oikumene* prompted since then has been supported by a philosophy of colonial domination and conquest. This is the case of the so-called Ecumenical Councils that envisioned a Catholic unity at the expense of the Eastern Church, as well as the modern ecumenical movement of Protestant missionary collaboration, charged with the ideology of "civilizing by cultural assimilation." Thus the very term *oikumene*, as a signifier of a common, unified, mutually comprehensible world, is part of the fiction we are called to cautiously parse. If we are to claim the possibility of Christian unity within our shared world, we have to do so acknowledging either that we inhabit not one but a plurality of visible worlds, sometimes interrelated and sometimes incompatible, or that there are groups of people who are inevitably denied hospitality in the human community and precluded from the historicized cartography of the inhabited world. In other words, if the faith and life experience of Latino/a Christians as constituting a distinctive religious "world" are overlooked so that they can be assimilated into the singular realm of a metaphorical Christendom, they are denied their rightful place in the *oikumene*.

In fact, Latino/a Christians often become non-habitants, people without an *oikos*, and spiritual immigrants within their own denominational traditions. Given this fact, it comes as no surprise that Latinos'/as' fictionalized experience is obsessed with homes. Assuming an identity as people in the diaspora, regardless of their desire for permanence in the host culture, "home" serves as a metaphor of memory. Home is the real and imaginary place we can return to (by the path of nostalgia) if the frequent outsider-insider dynamics we experience in the host culture becomes heavy and unbearable. Transposing this into the ecumenical experience, we can assert that engaging others who live faith differently is a possibility because there is always a home we can return to when healthy dialogue and agreement fail. The pre-eminence of home (*oikos*) as

distinctive from the *oikoumene* (the larger and imagined home where we all can fit in, even those who are constructed as Other) makes *place* an important category of theological reflection for Latinos/as.

The actual place Latinos/as call home, whether the *barrio*, *la frontera*, or the ancestral homeland, impinges significantly on how they develop their theological perspectives (De LaTorre and Aponte 2001: 53–5). In this respect, Latinos/as can be valuable partners in the ecumenical efforts of the Church, as they bring the knowledge and experience that appreciate the importance of *place* as a necessary category for articulating a faith stance. After all, ecumenical efforts are about the creation of spaces for shared faith experience. The interpretation of the unified world where a plurality of faith perspectives can cohabit meaningfully necessitates the sensibility of cultures for whom place is part of the *locus theologicus*. Ecumenism cannot bring forward the envisioned unity without taking hold of this “topistic” hermeneutics. Attention to *topos* grounds the ecumenical formulation in a concrete place where real practices and meaningful conversations among members of ecclesial communities can actually happen, and where visible realizations of Christian unity are revealed. Without the *topistic* emphasis, ecumenical efforts will continue to point to the ontology of an invisible Church, thus remaining essentially *u/topistic*.

If ecumenical efforts are about the creation of spaces for shared faith experience, the formulation of common confessional language, joint mission, and mutual understanding and tolerance, then a topistic hermeneutic is one significant contribution of the Latino/a experience to this conversation. In the epistemology that has shaped our approaches to ecumenism, a localized (Western, Anglo-European) way of thinking is betrayed. Allow me an example of this declaration. Commonly, ecumenical interactions are conditioned by dialogical categories rather than expressive performances in situ. What is said and communicated, rather than how the space of interaction is experienced, seems to determine the outcomes of inter-Church relations. That is the reason why relationships among Christian communities are predicated on agreements on doctrinal language, rational co-participation, principles of civic conduct, policies for social action, and deliberate negotiations around the fragile boundaries of “Truth” and “Tradition.”

The focus on dialogical discourse not only pertains to inter-ecclesial conversations on doctrine (*Faith and Order* domain) but also to cooperative intervention for social transformation (*Life and Work* domain). This has allowed some critics, such as Jordan J. Ballor (2010), to consider the Church’s joint social witness as the expression of an ecumenical Babel, a place where languages are confused. This logocentrism, as many cultural critics may call it, makes dialogue the trope of Western democratic pretensions and the *sine qua non* for ecumenical interactions, despite a lack of analysis of how the construct of *dialogue* entered into the theological lexicon. This may be the reason why Latin American theologian José Míguez Bonino (1969), reflecting on ecumenism, states that it is important to substitute the word *dialogue* for *encuentro* (encounter), for it requires us not to negotiate theological propositions from our own standpoint, but to come out of ourselves and to become one with

the other as we mutually seek to apprehend what lies before us but cannot be fully comprehended by either one of us.

In contradistinction, a permanent consciousness of place develops a different epistemological approach to ecumenical interactions, an expressive one that focuses not on what is said or narrated in wordy declarations, but on what Emmanuel Levinas (1995) has termed the "ethics of proximity." This ethics allows the mutual recognition that before each other, people who inhabit different worlds (theological, traditional, confessional, and cultural) are responsible for sustaining the habitability of the shared space (the Church). The Latino/a engagement with space as the scenario of migratory processes permits the various ethnic and racial groups that constitute the socially constructed cultural group we call Hispanic/Latino/a to forge alliances, out of their differences, in order to reap the benefits of the temporary home. The permanent home left behind is imbued, like every other homeland, with nationalist sentiments and tied to strong traditions and patriotic exceptionalism. Nevertheless, the diaspora space constitutes a new social geography that allows the concurrent affirmation that we have a "home," a place where we are rooted, and that we significantly engage the receiving "home," the diaspora space we are now inclined to value with a dose of grateful acceptance and honest critique.

Similarly, the experience of inter-Church dialogue can be enriched if faith communities accept their position as religious and spiritual immigrants in the diaspora space of ecumenism. We are reminded, as Rowan Williams suggests, that "to be with God is also to be with all who are, by their choice or the choice of others, non-belongers; it is to be part of the social order that depends on nothing but God's presence and self-gift, God's decision to be with the non-belongers" (Williams quoted in Newell 2003: 2). Having affirmed our theological integrity as members of a distinctive ecclesial "home" and claiming at the same time our immigrant status in the ecumenical space can lead us to recognize that we inhabit but one of the worlds where faith expressions of the Christian message are embodied, practiced, and communicated. If this is an authentic space of encounter, we may need to come before each other without claims of dominion over Truth (the approach that is only possible in the geographical boundaries of conquest and alienation), yet retaining the core of our ecclesial identity, the part of that identity that furthers the imaginary of a unified Church, and welcoming change in the process. This is perhaps the most anxiety-producing aspect of the ecumenical space for those who have not yet developed the epistemic dispositions of an immigrant consciousness: the possibility that an encounter can produce changes that threaten the religious identity of those engaged to the point of destabilizing the world as we know it.

For sure, there is a rationale for this sort of anxiety, especially when we observe that religious exchange and interfaith exposure can move people from religious tradition to religious tradition, from faith community to faith community, or, at least, loosen the bonds between individuals and their original faith traditions. In relaxing their ties with a single ecclesial tradition, ecumenical encounters offer people opportunities to be distanced from the centers of religious identity, permitting them to become critical, to be spiritually pragmatic, to choose what is usable from that tradition, and to leave out

what doesn't seem important or life giving. As a result, the ecumenical encounter risks making the person less *affiliative* to their primary ecclesial community.

This fluidity in affiliation is at the crux of some Latino/a and non-Latino/a Catholics' concern at the proselytizing method of some Protestant Churches that seems to attract the interest of wandering Christians more than of those who are unchurched and in need of evangelization. Latino/a Protestants may not feel accountable for this form of proselytizing, as they consider it fair game to move people from one "defective" ecclesial body to a more realized one which, in the imaginary of the Latino/a Protestant, is the one that remains closer to the biblical witness. Yet beyond the ecclesial and theological rationale for this fluidity in affiliation (some even disaffiliate from the doctrine, worship style, and traditions of the community they still participate in) is the fact that mobility is a condition of the Latino/a experience. Displacements, fluidity, and uprootedness are certainly perspectives of life understood existentially by immigrants, but they are also the unsettling experience of spiritual and religious seekers in the diasporic culture we inhabit. This sort of widespread alienation of people from communities and traditions is a modern paradigm the Church is challenged to understand, and those who have lived in and through the paradigm are the best resources for comprehension of its dynamics and possibilities.

Mere observation of those diasporic souls among us, especially the Latino/a representation of that soul, will reduce our anxieties, for in its negotiation with the new space where worlds collide and merge, the diasporic soul continues to retain an identity closely linked to home. However, the one who experiences the parallel habitation of more than one world will never fully return home. Latino/a fiction is embedded with this sense that homecoming (*nostos*) is always possible, and it is this nostalgic view that fuels the imagination while living in the new home. But returning to a home that would look and feel the same will be no longer possible after living in the new diaspora space.

The reader should know that the previous claim is not a cautionary tale; it is the way those in our religious traditions, without our consent or recognition, have already merged distinctive religious and cultural homes and have come back to our tradition's home to form and experience a different reality of the Church. In fact, we have never inhabited a singular world within our faith traditions. There are multiple Catholic worlds inhabited within the Church as there are multiple Protestant and Evangelical worlds, for these ecclesial bodies are not, and have never been, monolithic. Ecumenism is not the engine that generates ecclesial diversity; it is the space where that diversity becomes visible, recognized, and attended to. To think otherwise, to think that independently and by themselves, without the influence of ecumenical exchanges, our faith traditions constitute an already unified, commonly accepted, and uncontested home we can return to, is only a nostalgic illusion. And like all nostalgia, it impedes us from paying attention to the visible diversity that exists at home, within what we have called "the unity of the Church." Nostalgia removes from our collective view those things that do not resemble our desired home, and by doing so reduces our ability to understand and think about the worlds we inhabit in transformative ways.

New Language: Ecumenism in Spanglish

Historical *narrativity* can lend itself to translation without defacing the objective reality it tends to describe. Fictional narration, in contrast, depends on the nuances of language and cannot be translated without losing some of its intended meaning. Meaning is so connected to language in fiction that a failure in understanding the semantic schemes of the latter jeopardizes constructing the former. If we are to continue pressing the premise that the fictional character of the Latino/a experience can contribute to a new form of ecumenism, we cannot move on without a dedicated reflection on the language of the community. In fact, in discussing matters of ecumenical exchanges, I have argued elsewhere that the linguistic element of the Latino/a community can provide a generative paradigm for inter-ecclesial dialogue and, therefore, can aptly inform our efforts to establish ecumenical relations (Irizarry 2008). In affirming that, I suggest that bilingualism, as a linguistic determinant of the Latino/a speaker, offers us some usable traits that, if utilized in the practice of ecumenical relations, can infuse these relations with new meanings. The traits of the bilingual language I want to bring to the surface as pertinent to this argument are mutability, code-switching, unpredictability, and creativity.⁴

Language provides meaning when it can be effectively used to communicate in order to sustain social relations. The Latino/a subject moves back and forth between two distinct linguistic communities: that which speaks and organizes its mental frameworks in English, and that which speaks and organizes its mental frameworks in Spanish. As Carmen Nanko-Fernández observes, the language preferences of Latinos/as “range from Spanish dominance to English dominance with an assortment in between” (Nanko-Fernández 2010: 63). On various occasions, Latinos/as find themselves in the in-between of languages, *storying* their life with the mixed language jokingly dubbed *Spanglish*. Speaking in two languages allows mutability as Latinos/as can transit *in and out* of linguistic communities with skills not afforded by monolingualism. That mutability has practical implications. When the bilingual person feels that one linguistic community is not fulfilling immediate ontological needs (emotional, spiritual, psychological, and the like), he or she can count on a second relational space in which to explore the fulfillment of those needs. The monoculture at home and the monoculture of the diaspora are inclined to assimilate the Latino/a person, but by using Spanglish the Latino/a person defies such assimilation by remaining at the border, that liminal space where he or she can be but partially co-opted by each speech community. Using two languages that can help the self to mutate from one linguistic community to another may serve as a strategy for resilience. This mutability removes the person from the control that a singular monolingual group may hold over them, thus allowing the person to resist what limits personal freedom while welcoming whatever is life enhancing in each community.

The mechanism that bilingual speakers use to be effective in this movement from one language community to another is that of “code-switching.” When linguists speak

about code-switching, they point to the mental agility of the bilingual person in changing not only the forms of language (words) but the frames of reference (speech) as they speak (Heller 1995). Remarkably enough, as the use of Spanglish clearly demonstrates, there is no specific set of norms used to regulate this code-switching. There is no particular canon for determining when to use one *language* or *el otro*, or even what particular *palabra* in a verbalized sentence will be spoken in Spanish or *en inglés*. Rather than a linguistic technique, this code-switching mechanism works as a form of communicative artistry that articulates not only a message, but also the tone of speech, the intention of the speaker, and the quality of relationship the message invites. By using a language that allows code-switching, the Latino/a bilingual “knows” in a more existential form what language to use for achieving understanding and for communicating the feelings of their experience in a particular social situation. The use of two or more languages in daily life interactions becomes a communicative device intended to evoke meanings in both speakers and listeners as they seek to better understand each other.

When language becomes a play with the rules of “proper” use, as Spanglish does, it engenders communicative unpredictability. This playful character of bilingualism allows speakers to free themselves from the tautological determinations of life and enjoy new perspectives in what seems to become a predictable social condition. Waiting to speak or to listen to an exchange in Spanglish is always in the expectation of a new retelling of a known narrative. The content of the exchange, even when it is well known by the interlocutors, will be listened to in a new way, and in the process has the potential to infuse new meanings and interpretations into well-preserved narratives. With Spanglish functioning as a *lectio divina* with each new conversation, fresh vistas can be opened on what was considered familiar, established, or taken for granted.

There is no doubt that by allowing mutability, code-switching, and unpredictability, the language of the Latino/a community has the right elements to develop a sustained capacity for creativity. Creativity is not only an aesthetic contrivance of the mind; it is an actual *facultad* to shift perceptions of reality while remaining grounded on one’s identity. When those we consider to be most creative, the artists, seem to use creativity to transform reality through an alternative depiction of it, we can still see through the layers of media who the artist is, their context and time. Therefore the perception that art is a “universal language” is only partially accurate, for such universalism is always mediated by the cultural and temporal, situated identity of the artist. What creativity does is develop a new epistemology. For the bilingual person, that epistemology is defined by a mode of thinking that is continuously challenged with the tension of two different conceptions of reality (Sommer 2004). Because this tension is experienced *en lo cotidiano*, bilinguals can develop cognitive skills to negotiate alternative identity positions and withstand the resulting tension with more creative devices than monolinguals deploy. This creativity can serve as a model for ecumenical relations, for it invites us to reconsider inter-ecclesial relations anew by attending to a renewed interest in a language of “Christian unity” that can be positively mutable, exchangeable, and unpredictable.

Ecumenism however, has been traditionally affected by its linguistic *staticism*. While many joint declarations of Church unity and inter-ecclesial concordances have been expressed in various languages, they rarely meet at the liminal space where language can be effectively mutable and flexible. While few ecumenists may equate the desire for ecclesial “unity” with “unicity” of doctrinal languages, the truth remains that a foundational identity of the Christian Church that surpasses denominational and confessional relativism is said to be found in a common language. That common language is always seeking to describe the “core” of Christian identity as the encountering point of diverse ecclesial communities and traditions. Invariably, that core has been defined as assent to the tenets of the Apostolic faith, engagement with practices of sacramental life, and discipleship in the form of service and mission. Without all these components as part of their language, Christian communities will be unable to find crossroads of understanding among those whose faith traditions are different than theirs. Yet, once each community begins to articulate this core in their own particular language, new interpretations of the Christian faith emerge. In other words, the moment we start narrating the elements of the “core” language of unity is the moment that we speak out our diversity. The moment we take hold of the desired catholicity of the Church is the moment we are required to “switch codes” and interpret such unity in the different languages of our ecclesial communities. Therefore ecclesial diversity should be considered not as an obtrusive element in Christian unity (as speaking in two languages should not be seen as detrimental to a unified national culture), but as a creative expression of a faith tradition that in searching for a better comm/union has expanded the languages by which the divine experience can be communicated. To the point is Yves Congar’s (1984) observation that “pluralism is the intrinsic value of unity,” so that bringing back that diversity into communion is the crux of the ecumenical task.

One of the challenges of ecumenical encounters is the fear that part of the unique identity of faith communities will be lost if we dare to negotiate our “languages” (including values and meaning perspectives) and incorporate some of the “idioms” from other communities. Some may say that ecumenism may risk the apparent purity of proper and functional ecclesial language. In other words, ecumenism naturally resists its own capacity for speaking “Spanglish.” But as we have argued, bilingual capacities may help us adopt a model of unity that affirms the uniqueness of each community’s ecclesial identity, inviting communication in the process while resisting assimilation. When the bilingual speaker uses two languages, he or she shares the values and experience of a different speech community without giving up his or her identity as a member of a distinctive linguistic home. Latinos/as have transposed this bilingual quality into their faith experience, as can be observed when Roman Catholic communities adopt liturgical, homiletical, and musical forms that are common to Latino/a Protestant worship, while preserving a strong sense of tradition rooted in their identity as Catholics (perhaps with more intensity than monolingual and monocultural Catholics do). By the same token, Latino/a Protestant communities have developed a unique form of piety that contrasts with other expressions of Protestantism, precisely because it is informed by Catholic mores and popular

religion. Such distinctive piety has not displaced the identity of Latino/a Protestants who recognize themselves as “other” to the Catholic tradition.

A new ecumenical fiction may need to trust that fostering and encouraging more than one language of faith is a way of strengthening the Church’s unity by affirming the unique identity of each ecclesial community as it mutates in and outside the desired comm/union. Bilingualism challenges the ecumenical models of organic union that see the *pastiche* Church that speaks one language as the only expression of unity in Christ. Pope John Paul II in 1995 cautioned us about this misguided approach to inter-Church relations when he stated that ecumenism should be not “a matter of adding together all the riches scattered throughout the various Christian Communities in order to arrive at a Church which God has in mind for the future,” but rather one of “making the partial communion existing between Christians grow towards full communion in truth and charity” (*Ut unum sint*, no. 14). This is the sort of unity that bilingual sensibilities evoke in the larger *culture* and that can be transposed into the ecumenical world; a world where full participation with *Christ Ecclesia* is coexistent with the accentuated particularities of each member of that body.

While bilingual speech takes advantage of the life perspectives of two linguistic communities, one has to recognize that the two languages maintain asymmetrical functions. While one language ties us to what we identify as “home,” thus prevailing in private conversations and relations, the other is used to gain equal status as participants on the public stage. When using both languages intermittently, as Spanglish does, the fragile boundaries between private and public are diffused. The bilingual sensibility, then, presents a problem to ecumenism, since Christian faith has traditionally been conceived as a private practice with public repercussions. Although ecumenical encounters are envisioned as faith practices, they seem to conceal the private language of ecclesial communities in favor of a public representation of Christian unity. This is a conundrum that the ecumenical movement wrestles with, since it has struggled to explore the impact of inter-Church relations on the interior private life of ecclesial communities. Ecumenism is something done with exteriority, but difficult to bring into an inward reflection of one’s theological tradition and identity.

A language that can transit between private and public spheres and even merge them will be of better service in building the ecumenical fiction. The Apostle Paul, who holds the emerging Church to the standards of the bilingual community (speaking the languages of the Jews and Hellenic Gentiles as members of the same “linguistic” community formed at Pentecost), challenges the idea of the Greek *polis* and its emphatic separation of the private (realm of the *oikos*) from the public forum. Paul asserts that this separation is inadequate to describe the new social reality of the community of the Resurrected. In his letter to the Ephesians he counsels the Church, saying: “you are no longer strangers and aliens but you are citizens (*sympolitai*) with the saints and also the members of the household (*oikeioi*) of God” (Ephesians 2:9). Both the *polis* and the *oikos* are to be integrated into the experience of faith as Christians seek to build a sense of universal purpose (Milbank 1997). Theological variances cultivated at home cannot dissuade Christian communities from joining other Christian communities to give

public witness to faith in acts of solidarity and justice. A bilingual sensibility will allow the ecumenical-minded subject to remain authentic in his or her denominational home at the same time as sharing in equally authentic relationships elsewhere. These relationships will provoke and evoke the public appearance of the invisible Church.

An Inconclusive Epilogue

To argue that Christian ecumenism needs to reinvigorate its traditional paradigms in pursuing Church unity within the context of late modernity should proceed uncontested. Not only is the "universalist" pretension of encompassing institutional narratives bankrupt, but globalization has come under scrutiny for its attempt to aggressively brand human diversity under the biggest corporate names of world capitalism. The challenge of the Church is, then, how to reach the desired unity of the Body of Christ, without constructing all-encompassing narratives of faith and without creating cultural products (institutions, texts, programs) that need to be reproduced elsewhere if communities are to be labeled "Christian." To break with both temptations, ecumenism should start to consider new storytellers, new metaphors along with alternative "spaces" where these metaphors can be performed, and a new language. These are sources for a new knowledge of ecumenical relations. These sources can be found not necessarily among those we have become aware of through dialogue but among those faith communities rendered invisible because they have not settled yet in a particular home, for they are, by definition and their existence, "pilgrims and strangers."

Therefore, since no community is totally at home in the ecumenical encounter, and since the Church Catholic is not determined by one authoritative community, all communities encounter each other at the hyphen, in what theologian Hans Küng termed a "third space" (1990). That third space constitutes the fictional diaspora all people of faith inhabit. A new epistemology may be needed in the diaspora space of ecumenical relations. It is not the Cartesian epistemology in which we affirm "we think, therefore we can rationalize and talk ourselves into unity," our often-critiqued but rarely repented *Cogito ergo sum*. What we need to exercise in substitution is a Borgista epistemology in which we affirm that "we appear before the other, and the experience of that other brings more unity to my thinking and being as a person of faith." As Borges perceptively concluded, *Esse est percipi*; to exist is to be seen. The Latino/a Church is waiting to be seen on the stage of ecumenical encounters where the unity of the Church is conceived. Its faith and life experience conceal the sources for a new form of ecumenism.

In saying that the Latino/a experience can precipitate a new understanding of ecumenism I am not suggesting, as José Vasconcelos (1995) proposed some nine decades ago, that when considering the Spanish-speaking cultures of the Americas we are before a cosmic race, where insights for all global dilemmas can be found. It is not the role of Latino/a Christianity or of any other cultural form of Christianity to advance the "universal era of the Church," in which the ecumenical fiction becomes an historical realization. In fact, as acknowledged before, Latinos/as from the pews and the

pulpits, from kneelers and altars, have not participated widely in ecumenical projects of “faith and order” and the education that goes into shaping the character of an ecumenical Christian. Nevertheless, the lack of ecumenical engagement at the level of doctrinal and confessional exchangeability is not the product of an inherent cultural adversity to the possibility of such exchanges, but the result of an imposed condition of oblivion. Relegated to the periphery of Church tradition and history, the Latino/a Christian is simply not seen within the space of ecumenical interactions.

For traditional ecumenical interlocutors, the only cultural identity at stake in such conversations is the “denominational-theological” culture of each ecclesial community. For them, the Latino/a faithful who want to engage in these conversations are expected to look like a certain type of Christian strangely called “us,” but not to engage an exercise of religious self-construction. Nevertheless, precisely because each faith tradition, denominational identity, and theological construction experiences the fragmentation of the Church’s unity, we all live a diasporic existence in the ecumenical space. This is a space that Latinos/as can faithfully inhabit, for this diasporic existence is the creative and transformative stage of our fictions.

Notes

- 1 Charles Taylor has contributed significantly to the development of a theory of social imaginary. For Taylor, this imaginary encompasses the way people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on within them and their fellow, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations.
- 2 While the terms “Latino/a” and “Hispanic” are commonly interchangeable, I will use the word “Latino/a” as a self-referential appropriation of a communal identity by members of Spanish-speaking background residing in the continental United States of America, and the word “Hispanic” as the socio-political label attributed to such groups by the state’s organizations for demographical purposes.
- 3 A more comprehensive and detailed description of Protestant engagement with the farmers’ movement is found in Hinojosa (2014).
- 4 For this section I have adapted my more detailed discussion on the matter of bilingualism in the *New Theology Review* (Irizarry 2008).

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PART II

Theologizing the Theological Tradition

CHAPTER 5

Revelation

Efrain Agosto

The starting point for a Latino/a theology of revelation is defining the expressions: “divine self-disclosure” (Carbine 2007: 1166); “the self-disclosure of God and the communication of the truth about [God’s] nature and will” (Pelikan 1979: 3037); and, referencing the Greek term – *apocalypsis* – “unveiling of what was hidden” (Sauter 2010: 1074). Thus, “revelation” is about God taking the initiative to speak to and be present with humanity. Divine self-disclosure anticipates human response to God (Carbine 2007: 1166). In Christian theology, revelation has been connected to the Bible. Protestant evangelical scholars in particular insist that traditionally, “Scripture was taken to be the locus of divine speaking” (Pinnock 1971: 22). In twentieth-century neo-orthodox Protestant theologies and post-Vatican II Roman Catholicism, such exclusive connections between revelation and the Bible have been challenged (Pinnock 1971: 22–8). Similar attitudes toward Scripture and revelation, as we shall see later, exist in most Latino/a theologies.

The doctrine of revelation has also been traditionally divided into the categories of “general” and “special revelation.” “General revelation” refers to knowledge about God through “the reasoned reflection on creation, human history and ordinary human experience” (Carbine 2007: 1167). “Special revelation” refers to the special means of knowing God, namely through Jesus Christ and Christian Scripture (Carbine 2007: 1167). Again, in this regard evangelical scholars tend to be more specific about the role of Scripture: “Special revelation [in contrast to general revelation] is the name given to revelation in the Bible” (Morris 1976: 32). Such views lend final authority to the revelation of God in Scripture, especially since it is in the Bible that we find God’s ultimate revelation, the person and work of Jesus Christ (Morris 1976: 43, 49–67). One

evangelical scholar refers to the revelation of God in Christ – the “Incarnation” – as “redemptive revelation” (Pinnock 1971: 29–30).

Roman Catholic theology, both in its response to the Protestant Reformation at the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century, and in the Second Vatican Council of the 1960s, has included official doctrines, church decrees and transmitted traditions as sources of “special revelation” (Carbine 2007: 1167). However, Latino theologian Orlando Espín reminds us that “tradition,” that is, the content of Christian belief across the centuries, is known through “traditioning,” which is the process of transmitting tradition. “Traditioning,” argues Espín, involves “the construction, discovery, clarification and affirmation of life’s meaning, and for Christians, consequently, the meaning of revelation” (Espín 2006: 4). Espín agrees that God is the “source of revelation” but also that “revelation exists only [in human cultures] where/when it is received as word of God.” Culture is key for the reception and transmission of the meaning of revelation. Culture as the font of human activity is the means of divine self-disclosure, since “the human partner [in divine revelation] is intrinsically shaped and bound by culture” (Espín 2006: 4).¹

Thus God’s self-disclosure occurs “in the revelatory divine–human dialogue,” and culture is a “necessary medium” for revelation to be “received and understood as word of God.” Besides teaching us about God, revelation teaches us about ourselves. “Revelation unveils for Christians the most foundational grounding of their humanness.” Human culture makes revelation possible (Espín 2006: 4). Espín does not ignore the sinfulness of human culture, but God has chosen human culture, history, and experience to reveal God-self, in spite of human sin. Indeed, “revelation does not depend on or require sinless humanity, or a sinless church, but it does require human cultures” (Espín 2006: 5).

Nonetheless, both Protestant and Roman Catholic faith traditions regard Jesus Christ “as the full and complete self-revelation of God” (Carbine 2007: 1167). Second Vatican Council documents proclaim that “Christ represents the definitive divine revelation because the Christ event comprises the agent, the process and the content of God’s self-communication” (Carbine 2007: 1167). Thus, self-revelation takes place in “specific historical and ecological contexts.” In other words, the ultimate expression of divine revelation according to both Catholic and Protestant theology is the “incarnation” of God in the human form of Jesus. We shall return to this topic later when we discuss Latino/a christologies, including the incarnation.

Human history and human experience have significant roles for mediating the presence of God (Carbine 2007: 1168). Both Roman Catholic and Protestant theologies are Christ-centered in their understanding of “special revelation.” However, Protestant theology tends to focus more on the role of Scripture as the source of revelation, especially since it is where we find the story of Christ. It is the Bible – both Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament as interpreted by Christian theologians throughout the centuries – that reveals Christ as God’s final saving action on behalf of humanity. For many Christians, the Bible is about the “Word of God in Christ.” In Catholic theology, especially after the Second Vatican Council, Scripture and tradition constitute “a single

sacred deposit of the word of God,” that is, “a sole deposit of faith” (Carbine 2007: 1168). What this means is that both Scripture and tradition focus on God and Christ not just as doctrines but as interrelated self-disclosure of the divine, which expects human response (Carbine 2007: 1168).

How do we attend to a Latino/a theology of revelation founded on these basic definitions in the history of Christian thought on the doctrine of revelation? Rosemary Carbine reminds us that “contemporary constructive theologies of God point the way toward a theology of revelation that transforms the kind of knowledge of God available in revelation” (Carbine 2007: 1169). Not only do we get “general knowledge of the existence and attributes of God” and the specific knowledge of “the salvific will of God” in Christ and Scripture, but contemporary theologies also point to “the goal of the common life not yet fully realized in the world” (Carbine 2007: 1169). In other words, revelation points to an ethical practice in light of God’s divine presence among human beings and communities of faith. It is on this point in particular that Latino/a theological reflection on revelation makes major contributions.

In this chapter, I wish to illustrate this matter by looking at Latino/a reflection on the nature of Scripture as revelation, Latino/a theologies of christology and incarnation, and how the Holy Spirit invigorates human response to revelation. Finally, I ask what we learn about the nature of the revealed God in Latina/o theology, specifically through a discussion of divine transcendence. To facilitate the study, I will focus first on Latino/a Roman Catholic reflection on Scripture, tradition, and revelation, and then Latino/a Protestant reflection on Christ, incarnation, and Spirit.

Latino/a Roman Catholic Theological Reflection on Revelation

Revelation and Scripture

Latino biblical scholar Jean Pierre Ruiz argues for a “U.S. Latina/o Christian theology of revelation” (Ruiz 2009: 53). First of all, Ruiz asks, how do we understand divine self-disclosure in a way that speaks from the heart of the Latino/a people, including our reflection on our daily experience as well as the role of Scripture as a sacred and authoritative source of revelation, especially when Catholic and Protestant theologians differ on this point about the nature of Scripture. Yet I agree with Ruiz that we must continually look in the most “unlikely places” for divine revelation, including human experience and culture (Ruiz 2009: 61; Agosto 2009: 73). In this way, as Ruiz suggests, we come to terms “with the place of the Bible among Latino/a Christians” in order to develop an adequate “U.S. Latina/o Christian theology of revelation” (Ruiz 2009: 55).

Yet such an effort is not without its difficulties, not the least of which is that often the Bible is used to oppress people of color, including Latino/as. Francisco Lozada, for example, argues that we must challenge “the authority of the biblical tradition” because otherwise we adopt the Bible’s ambiguous stand toward “the other” (Lozada 2006; cited by Ruiz 2009: 59). Lozada wonders why we need to use the biblical tradition to

challenge “otherness,” such as minority status and gender inequality in current society. The biblical record is inconclusive and we should not try to present a different picture, argues Lozada. According to Lozada, we should be ready to critique the Bible, appropriate its message, or not, depending on its liberating aspect, without necessarily “prioritizing the text” (Ruiz 2009: 60, citing Lozada). Biblical authority, as a source of revelation, needs to be “de-centered” (Ruiz’ 2009: 60, citing Lozada).

Ruiz does not completely accept Lozada’s argument, but he does agree that a theology of revelation needs to focus less on the “letter of biblical *traditum*” (the Bible as the supreme “deposit” of revelation) and more on *traditio*, a more dynamic engagement between content and process. In this way, “divine self-disclosure” is less a matter of “pages of the texts” and more under the guidance, in Johannine terms, of where the “Spirit blows.” How do the people of God interpret those texts that reflect the revelation of God at each stage and in each context of human existence and history, as well as culture, including the Latino/a cultures in the US?

Here Ruiz connects to the theology of incarnation. For if the “word became flesh” in Jesus Christ, as taught by the Gospel of John, then our own “incarnate” stories of the experience of divine self-disclosure “brim” with “revelatory potential and power” (Ruiz 2009: 61). In other words, the “locus of divine self-revelation” lies on the “borderlands” of human experience, not just on the pages of written texts alone. This challenges the Protestant notion of *sola scriptura*² but follows the Roman Catholic teaching about the *sensus fidelium* – the faith of God’s people and their “sense” or intuition about where to find the “word of God,” i.e., “revelation.”³

In an earlier essay, Jean-Pierre Ruiz argues extensively on behalf of a theology of scriptural revelation that is tempered by the cultural experience of the Latino/a peoples (Ruiz 2006: 83–112). In this essay, Ruiz draws on a cultural tradition in the Cuban American cigar manufacturing industry in Tampa, Florida, in which “lectors” read to the workers in ways that entertain, educate, and empower (Ruiz 2006: 83–90). How do we use both authorized texts and traditions, therefore, asks Ruiz, that present the revelation of God to God’s people in ways that empower them? Ruiz cites examples from the Spanish conquest of Mexico to show that written texts sometimes are used as control mechanisms over subjected peoples rather than authentic vehicles of God’s revelation such that there is liberation and empowerment. In fact, the peoples of the Americas had their own “texts,” albeit not in forms that were recognizable to their Spanish conquerors, Ruiz points out. In effect, the paintings of the Aztecs were their “writing.” They, like the lectors in the Cuban cigar factories, were offering an expansion of how “knowledge” was received through their pictorial representations of life, history, and ritual in ancient Aztec lands, before Europe and their “western texts” arrived (Ruiz 2006: 95–7).

Nonetheless, despite this “different literacy” the conquerors insisted on providing a translation of their “fixed scripture” in alpha writing and turned the “living tradition” of their conquered peoples into a “fixed scripture.” Spanish conquerors and religious missionaries arrived with a “bias toward texts (*scriptura*) as a fixed and authoritative medium for the accurate transmission (*traditio* as process) of information” (Ruiz 2006:

100), including revelation. Yet the oral transmission of divine revelation as practiced by native peoples in the Americas, with their pictorial texts serving as prompts for reflection on revelation, remained a practice notwithstanding the demands of their conquerors. Too much “written text” for revelation without acknowledgment of other means can be a purveyor of control, a “narrowly cultural materialist approach to texts” (Ruiz 2006: 102).

Moreover, argues Ruiz, regarding texts as authoritative scripture is ultimately a very human activity (Ruiz 2006:104). Ruiz notes that in fact published texts are a late phenomenon and that oral traditions always carried the day at the grassroots level when literacy was not possible. Did not God reveal God-self to the *sensus fidelium* – the faith of the people – without written texts? In fact, this is how revelation mediates change in the human condition, through the divine–human encounter; it is not just the matter of a static “deposit.” Tradition, therefore, according to Catholic theology, Ruiz reminds us, is a source of revelation; because it engages the divine–human divide in constant dialogue. The transformative power of revelation lies in being interpreted and reinterpreted over time by human beings. Change takes place in the process of reading the tradition (Ruiz 2006:104). In short, reading Scripture and tradition should result in transformative action – change for the good – as was the hope for the working-class audience of cigar factory lectors that Ruiz describes. What God reveals needs fresh reading in new contexts with new peoples in order to bring about the desired effect, which is what revelation from God originally seeks – transformation of the human condition.

This is why Francisco Lozada urges caution in our appropriation of the biblical tradition in determining God’s will for God’s people, i.e., revelation (Lozada 2006). Lozada reminds us that social hermeneutical interpretation of the Bible seeks to ensure attention to “difference” and the “Other.” Yet why should the biblical tradition have so much authority, asks Lozada. Oftentimes, as illustrated by several Latino/a and Latin American biblical scholars that he studies, we want to force the issue of the “otherness” of the Bible when in fact many biblical stories and propositions offer an oppressive picture of human treatment of difference. Any time we try and force the celebration of “otherness” in Scripture beyond what is actually there, positive or negative, we lend too much authority to the text. Lozada wants to deconstruct the authority of the biblical text in order to come more closely in touch with the liberative aspects of divine self-disclosure in human history, both in and beyond the written text.

However, there is one biblical scholar, Elsa Tamez (2003), who closely approximates Lozada’s vision for appropriate use of the Bible in the quest for human connection to divine revelation. Tamez argues that 1 Timothy is not the best representative in the Christian Scriptures for the liberative gospel of Jesus Christ. The author of 1 Timothy attempts to refocus his community on “good works,” including by well-to-do women in the church. In fact, this author reminds his audience about “the redemptive work of Christ” and that “God is revealed through the works of real flesh (1 Tim. 3:16a) rather than any abstract ideas” (Lozada 2006: 129). Nonetheless, Tamez recognizes that 1 Timothy undermines women’s roles and insists on keeping the deposit of truth as

interpreted by the male leaders of the church as essential to gospel practice despite the limitations of their teachings. There are more powerful visions of the gospel message – the revelation of Jesus Christ – that are truer to it, argues Tamez. 1 Timothy, per se, but especially in its interpretations that for generations have been used to oppress women, is unrepresentative of the revelation of God in Christ, which is a message of liberation, as argued by Tamez and Lozada, as well as many Latino/a and Latin American Christian theologians. For Tamez, there are better models of liberation in the New Testament; she references the Gospels of John and Mark as two such examples (Tamez 2003: 153–4; Lozada 2006: 133). 1 Timothy responds to “difference” with limiting options (Lozada 2006: 131–2).

Lozada and Tamez help us see that a Latino/a theology of revelation makes a distinction between the notion of “biblical revelation” and revelation as a whole. The latter is to be understood as the overarching message of God’s love, care, and liberation of and for humanity. This is sometimes reflected in the written texts, sometimes not, and we have to be able to discern the difference between general revelation and the contours of special revelation, including the written word.

In order to help with this discernment process, Lozada provides a “reading strategy,” which includes “developing alternative stances toward the biblical tradition” (Lozada 2006: 133). In this way, the Latino/a community can reauthorize, or not, the biblical text, or any other scriptural tradition. Reading strategies need to empower the “other,” not just the biblical tradition (Lozada 2006: 134). Thus “reading with others” is needed, the Latino/a community with other marginalized communities. We need to realize the limits of the biblical tradition, which, according to Lozada, is “an idealized, political and theological text.” The meaning of the biblical text, that is, its reflection on revelation, changes over time, given the context of readers.⁴

Reading strategies must take it seriously that the heart of divine self-disclosure often moves beyond written texts to the life of people of faith. Lozada cites postcolonial theory (as did Ruiz 2006: 102–4) as one reading strategy that helps that search for particularization and difference as opposed to universalization and harmonization. Postcolonial theory reads the Bible through the eyes of culture, both the culture of the reader and the culture of the Bible, and in this way diminishes the authority of one over the other. This allows for “a discourse that calls for equality and justice,” the ultimate aim of divine self-disclosure. Thus we need intertextuality in our reading of God’s revelatory action in the world, whether in human life or the texts we read, however much authority we give to them. (Lozada 2006: 136).

Tradition and revelation

When we “read” for divine revelation through our written and human “texts,” such a “conversation” changes us. So argues Latino Catholic theologian Gary Riebe-Estrella (2006). Change is the content of the divine revelation in Jesus Christ, but change comes through the process of conversation and the context within which the revelation is

understood. Thus we need “interchange between persons about their understanding of what has been revealed in Jesus Christ” (Riebe-Estrella 2006: 142). There are more formal examples of this throughout the history of the Christian church, such as ecumenical councils and church decrees, etc. In such official settings, theologians and church leaders dialogue and debate over the content of Christian revelation. Moreover, the practice of the faith helps transmit the meaning of revelation, oftentimes more than words in written texts or official church documents. Either way, people are changed by the encounter with divine revelation, or, as theologian Mayra Rivera argues, when they are “touched by transcendence” (Rivera 2007, to be discussed later).

Recipients of revelation reinterpret the “content of faith” when they encounter the divine through it (Riebe-Estrella 2006: 143). Put differently, “the content of tradition is the result of the construction of the human meaning of what has been encountered in Jesus Christ” (Riebe-Estrella 2006: 144). Tradition can be changed “by its being re-understood through the experiences and knowing process of the recipient” (Riebe-Estrella 2006: 144). We know Christ differently because we encounter his revelation in new and fresh ways throughout our lives and engagement (“conversations”) with others. Tradition about Christ – interpretation and reinterpretation of revelation – whether through Scripture or the theological reflections of the Church, can change over time. Moreover, what is handed down from one interpreter to the other exists only through this process of traditioning (as also described by Orlando Espín 2006, 2014). Each interpreter understands the tradition about revelation differently because of “the very nature of the process of knowing” (Riebe-Estrella 2006: 146).

Riebe-Estrella further states that revelation must be interpreted in ways that make sense for every new generation, and for that we need to have diversity in our conversation partners. Because we as interpreters of divine self-disclosure have our own means of “knowing,” it is best to have a variety of partners to help understand revelation. “While it is the same Jesus who is passed on, that Jesus is understood anew” in the process of handing down knowledge about him. Recipients of that knowledge include new communities of people. Divine revelation is not contradicted but is “conformed to be intelligible within the context of those receiving it” (Riebe-Estrella 2006: 147). Therefore, we must hear the voices of Latino/a Catholics and Protestants in our reading of God’s revelation in Christ.

Traditions about revelation are not monolithic, “but always composed of a number of traditions.” Experience is another partner in the conversations about revelation and tradition. “It is the experience of the individual Christian whose life is shaped by the revelation of Jesus Christ that has been handed down to him or her” (Riebe-Estrella 2006: 147). Also, culture partakes of these conversations, culture as a “constellation of forces” (Riebe-Estrella 2006: 148; Espín 2006: 4–5, 2014). Culture imparts how “a person understands his or her experience and what has been handed down to him or her of the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Riebe-Estrella 2006: 148).

These then are three dimensions of what is handed down in traditions about revelation through “conversation:” (1) the content of the revelation that is handed down; (2) the experience of that revelation as interpreted and described by its recipients; and

(3) the culture through which the revelation is lived out and expressed. However, whether we are talking about experience, culture, or the recipients of revelation, we must recognize the problem of sin. Riebe-Estrella describes sin as “defects in the knowing process” or “biases,” such as taking “the short-sighted view of things” or “being satisfied with the immediate rather than probing the larger issues at stake” (Riebe-Estrella 2006: 151; see also Espín 2006: 4–5, 2014). Such “deficiencies” – sin – affect the reinterpretation of the content of tradition during its “transmission” process. For example, “male privilege” often undermines the role of women in interpretive processes. However, being exposed, for example, to feminist perspectives on revelation, the tradition, and the Scriptures “may serve as corrective to [limited male] understanding of God” (Riebe-Estrella 2006: 152).

In sum, Riebe-Estrella demonstrates that conversations on tradition provide “deepening understanding of the revelation that has taken place in Jesus Christ.” This is a dynamic process, influenced by both experience and culture (Riebe-Estrella 2006: 153). What does it mean to engage this process *latinamente*? Simply put, Latino/a culture and experience has to be brought into the mix. “Analyzing the traditioning process using the metaphor of conversation allows us to see that the experiences of Latino/as in living out the faith in all areas of our lives over centuries of our people’s existence should be a constitutive element in the handing over of the revelation of God in Jesus” (Riebe-Estrella 2006: 154). In that way, traditions about revelation are not universal but contextual, because the process of knowing and understanding the revelation affects those traditions. Tradition is always particularized and the particulars should be set in a conversation with each other to avoid bias and deficiency. In this way, we “expand the horizons of our understanding of what God has done in Christ,” i.e., revelation (Riebe-Estrella 2006: 154).

Revelation and Trinity

While Riebe-Estrella writes in terms of “conversation,” Miguel Díaz (2006) describes the process of passing on the content of revelation in terms of “dialogue.” Critical to this dialogue is the theology of God as a Triune God, and, therefore, “relational.”⁵ Díaz posits that Christian theology of the Trinity helps constitute revelation in a more “interpersonal,” dialogical way. God not only reveals truths; rather revelation is understood to be God’s self-revelation. God invites believers by faith to enter into personal relationship and encounter with the divine being. “Revelation is person-to-person, subject-to-subject, I–thou encounter.” It is not about “what is revealed” but about “who” (Díaz 2006: 158).

Therefore, “tradition” is better understood as a process, not a “thing.” Díaz agrees with Espín and Riebe-Estrella that we should speak of “traditioning,” the process of transmission, which “mediates God’s life-giving presence” (i.e., revelation). Thus, Scripture and tradition have the same “mission” – “to communicate God’s triune mystery” for human benefit (Díaz 2006: 158). Divine revelation is triune and thus interpersonal. It is about

“who” and to “whom” rather than just “what.” It is about process over content. The question of revelation lies in “whose words, stories and actions” (the content of tradition) are handed over to whom (the recipients of revelation). Such “who” questions include Latino/as. There is no such thing as “impersonal bearers of truth.” Real people from actual cultures are engaged in traditioning revelation.

Thus the Trinitarian aspects of Christian theology help in understanding how revelation functions, how it is revealed to humanity, and how God’s self-revelation becomes, in turn, a paradigm for the community-building process of Christian faith. We function best as a community because God has revealed God-self, in part, as a triune God (Díaz 2006: 159). Latina Protestant scholar Zaida Maldonado Pérez put it this way: “We are a *familia* by virtue of the work of the Trinity” (Martell-Otero *et al.* 2013: 61). God, in Christ and Spirit, “hands over” (or “traditions”) God’s life. “In Christ and the Spirit, God hands over God’s self to effect authentic community” (Díaz 2006: 159). Thus the revelation of God is about community, not just propositional truth. Trinitarian thought helps affirm this claim. Díaz goes on to show some New Testament texts in support of his argument that in the New Testament we see “God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ and the Spirit” (Díaz 2006: 159–61).

Given these important Latino/a Roman Catholic reflections on Scripture, tradition, and Trinity, in what follows I wish to explore how some specifically Protestant Latino/a thinkers reflect on the nature of Christ and Spirit, and how these relate to the nature of divine revelation.

Latino/a Protestant Reflection on Revelation

Christ and incarnation

Latino Protestant theologian Luis Pedraja asserts, “Theological reflection should begin with human experience” (Pedraja 1999: 18). Moreover, “culture shapes” theological reflection (Pedraja 1999: 20). Indeed, reading the Bible is “a public affair” (Pedraja 1999: 19). Scriptures are a product of particular communities and language. Pedraja agrees with Orlando Espín that to understand Scripture fully, we must engage “popular religion,” the faith of the people, because that is who produced the Scriptures in the first place.⁶ Karl Barth summarized the gospel with the simple song, “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so,” and Latino/as resonate with such understanding of revelation as an encounter with God through human experience. “Divine revelation needs to be mediated to us through a human agent” (Pedraja 1999: 40). Pedraja reminds us that not all human agents reveal God to us – certainly not sadists, dictators, or murderers. However, the ultimate revelation of God, Christ, becomes a barometer through which we measure human experience that does reveal God. “Human experiences should be examined in light of the standards set by the life, deeds and message of Jesus Christ” (Pedraja 1999: 41). For the Latino/a Christian, Pedraja argues, certain aspects of Christ’s life and teachings resonate: “faith, love, compassion, suffering, hope and a desire for social change” (Pedraja 1999: 42).

The incarnation of Jesus Christ “affirms the possibility for us to encounter God’s presence through humanity.” If we focus on Jesus’ divinity alone, we thereby detach him from his humanity, and thus the encounter between God and humanity that is critical to a theology of revelation instead emphasizes “the discontinuity between God and humanity” (Pedraja 1999: 43). Incarnation points to a divine transcendence that has “touched” humanity (Pedraja 1999: 44), a point argued at length by Rivera (2007), as we shall see later in this chapter.

Thus there is “continuity” between Jesus and humanity. According to Pedraja, love is the essence of that continuity, the bond between God and humanity, which is mediated through Christ (Pedraja 1999: 44). A “physical reality” is represented by the incarnation, one that reveals God’s concrete act of love and how humanity encounters God. “God appears fully as one of us” (Pedraja 1999: 62). Latino/as identify with Jesus because of his humanity, more so than his divinity. This adds value to human “fleshly” experience. God is not just in the heavens, but revealed in flesh and blood (Pedraja 1999: 62). The incarnation reminds us “that God speaks through concrete human realities,” that is, “God’s self-disclosure always comes to us embodied and mediated through concrete vessels” (Pedraja 1999: 63).

Therefore, as part of our theology of revelation, we need “an expanded notion of the Incarnation that includes all instances revealing God’s presence in the world, human experience and history” (Pedraja 1999: 63). God’s revelation is ongoing in human experience, with the revelation of God in Christ as the template for where we find God in everyday human experience, what Latino and Latina theologians have called *lo cotidiano* – that which is in everyday life as a source of constructing our theologies. (See, for example, Espín 2006: 5–6, 2014.)

Revelation “in the flesh” Pedraja discusses several uniquely Spanish translations of terms associated with God’s revelation through Christ’s incarnation. First, the term “incarnation” itself in Spanish has a more “fleshly” connotation. In Spanish, *encarnación* literally means “becoming flesh.” Negative connotations of “flesh” in English, with such cognate terms as “carnal,” do not have the same impact in Spanish; for example, *carnal* in Spanish actually refers to a “brother” (Pedraja 1999: 75). Thus, incarnation supports the idea that humanity is incorporated into God’s family. In Spanish, *carne* refers to “meat” and *encarnar* means “to cause flesh to grow” or “embody.” Incarnation helps us to have “consciousness of our embodied reality” (Pedraja 1999: 76). Thus part of the divine self-disclosure in Christ is God becoming human, “growing flesh,” or becoming human flesh. Therefore, human flesh is good. In John 1:14, we read, “Word became flesh,” which in Spanish is translated as *se hizo carne* – “became meat.” The image of God is not just spiritual, but an embodied reality. God connects to the life in this world (Pedraja 1999: 77).

This should make us “pay closer attention to the world” that God inhabits (Pedraja 1999: 79). Ultimately, “Incarnation incorporates divinity and humanity into each other, creating a new reality,” much as in Latino/a cultural reality, “*mestizaje* and *mulatez*” combine different traits of Latino and Latina persons, cultures, and races

without creating a “sameness.” This “new reality” shows how Jesus is “the ultimate *mestizo* and the ultimate *mulatto*” – a mixture of human and divine. “Humanity cannot attain divinity on its own” but only through “divine initiative.” Yet the arrival of divinity, that is, revelation, takes place in “human flesh.” Incarnation teaches us to find God “in the midst of human life.” Our existence as “flesh and blood” remains “a part of God’s creation” and “not alien to God” (Pedraja 1999: 84).

God revealed as an “action verb” Another Spanish translation of a key term in the prologue of John’s Gospel involves the opening words, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). In Spanish the term for “Word” (Greek *logos*) is usually translated *Verbo* instead of *Palabra*. In this way God in Christ becomes an “action verb” (Pedraja 1999: 85–106). Jesus is God’s ultimate action on behalf of humanity, an active, living, breathing revelation (Pedraja 1999: 85). This idea of a revelation and incarnation that has God as an action verb permeates Latino/a theology. Theology, including a theology of revelation, “needs to reflect God’s active nature” (Pedraja 1999: 86). God is revealed in action. In Latin America, for example, liberation theology promotes a “praxis-oriented” theology: “The demands for justice and social change presented by liberation theology require more than ideas and conceptual truths disclosed through revelation. They require faith in a God who acts” (Pedraja 1999: 86). We cannot have static sets of belief, even if based on revelation and the Word of God as understood from Scripture, without putting these into action. Faith involves action, with “a commitment, a risk, a way of being and a way of living” (Pedraja 1999: 87).

Therefore, we must conceive of an “active christology,” one with praxis. This will entail believing that the “life, love and actions” of Jesus had “revelatory powers”; they showed us God’s will for our life of faith and action. For example, Jesus reveals that God is love. Jesus is revealed in his humanity; that’s where we find God. God is present when we practice God’s love, especially for those who suffer, because when God’s creation suffers, God suffers. Further, God is revealed in Christ “as one who acts concretely in human history out of love” (Pedraja 1999: 88). Therefore, “God’s revelation is not just a set of concepts, but a way of living; not just information, but action.” Pedraja’s theology of Christ and incarnation helps us see the nature of revelation, that “God’s love reveals itself through concrete action” (Pedraja 1999: 88).

In Spanish, therefore, the “written word of God” (*palabra*) focuses on Christ as *Verbo*, the active, living revelation of God (Pedraja 1999: 89). Jesus, the Logos, the revelation of God to humanity, incorporates “God’s wisdom and creative activity” (Pedraja 1999: 90). Moreover, “Jesus’ revelation consists of more than just cognitive information about God and our relationship to God. It also has an active dimension.” The Spanish term *verbo* communicates “the active and communicative nature of God’s revelation” (Pedraja 1999: 91). This is a God who acts in history, not just with theory but also with action (Pedraja 1999: 95). Thus Latino/a culture resonates with this “God of action.” Latino/a theology focuses on “praxis,” which points to “an active God who works to change the human condition.” Revelation comes to us this way. Pedraja asserts, “God works through concrete

circumstances and persons to bring forth change on a global scale.” Such action is difficult to see simply as “a private and spiritual affair,” and divine revelation is not to be understood only as an unveiling of the “attributes of God” for all to see (Pedraja 1999: 100). Because God is not a noun, but a verb, “abstract philosophical language” will not do to explain divine revelation. To describe God by what God is not – the “immutable,” “impassable,” “infinite,” “infallible” – makes God too distant and “alien” to most people (Pedraja 1999: 100–1).

In short, “rather than forcing God into the narrowness of a few philosophical creations, we should let our experience with God guide our thoughts and expand our understanding, philosophy and language.” A Latino/a theology of revelation tries “to understand who God is by what God does” (Pedraja 1999: 103). Because God acted in Christ, we can be sure God continues to be revealed through loving human action. “God’s divinity can also be present in our human activities” (Pedraja 1999: 105). Divinity was present in the activities of Jesus, including his life, ministry, miracles, teaching, death, and resurrection. Part of what we understand about divine revelation is that Jesus revealed “what is possible for all” (Pedraja 1999: 105). The “revelatory moments” of the Bible and “salvation history” are embedded in the actions of God: Creation, Exodus, Incarnation, the Cross, Resurrection. God continues to act today and our work today entails “discerning God’s presence in the world” (Pedraja 1999: 106). Where is there revelation anew?

Finally, Latinos and Latinas resonate with the God and Christ who reveal the dual nature of divinity and humanity. Latinas and Latinos as bilingual and bicultural people live in two worlds, yet are not always comfortable in either. Similarly, God can be revealed as both transcendent and immanently present in human reality (Pedraja 1999: 123). Moreover, the person and work of Christ are not divisible entities in Latina/o understanding of Christ. In fact, we can only know divinity through its presence in human activity. “We know Jesus’ divinity not because of a divine essence, but by his work” (Pedraja 1999: 124). Similarly, divine revelation becomes near to us as we work out the will of God in our lives and communities. What drives our work in the world? Another aspect of a Latino/a theology of revelation is reflection on the work of the Holy Spirit, to which we now turn with reflections from several Latina Protestant theologians.

The Holy Spirit and revelation

Latino/a Protestant theology insists that divine revelation “in action” is motivated by the presence of God, known in the Bible as “the Holy Spirit.” Zaida Maldonado Pérez⁷ describes the Holy Spirit as God with us and as “the passion in the Word-became-Verbo” (Martell-Otero *et al.* 2013: 16). Thus, for Maldonado Pérez, the Spirit is the “verb” in the Word. Like Pedraja, she cites the Gospel of John, to affirm that the Holy Spirit as “Advocate” is “God for us,” not just with us (Martell-Otero *et al.* 2013: 16). However, the Spirit is also “God in us,” the divine presence “in and through whom we commune with

the divine.” This presence helps us discern God’s will for our lives and empowers us for service in God’s work (Martell-Otero *et al.* 2013: 17).

What does it mean for the Holy Spirit to be present in our lives? According to Loida Martell-Otero, the Spirit “draws near to speak, to comfort, reveal, touch, strengthen, anoint, encourage, heal and bring new life” (Martell-Otero *et al.* 2013: 19–20). Several biblical images reflect the nature of God’s revelation through the Holy Spirit, such as *ruach*, “wind,” which blows where needed. The Spirit is also “God’s *dynamis* – God’s power and active presence in the world” (Martell-Otero *et al.* 2013: 20). Moreover, we “feel” God’s presence because of the Spirit’s presence and power. Citing Latina *evangélica* (Protestant) theology in general, Martell-Otero posits, “The *evangélica* notion of *presencia* [presence] is the affirmation that God the Spirit is present in the world bringing life, hope, and transformation in all its spaces” (Martell-Otero *et al.* 2013: 21). Moreover, such divine presence through God’s Spirit is nonetheless “never immaterial or disincarnate.” Like Pedraja, Latina Protestant theologians and practitioners – *las evangélicas* – agree, “*evangélica* pneumatology is deeply incarnational, which implies it is always contextual,” that is, it is present in the lives of real flesh-and-blood people, with concrete results (Martell-Otero *et al.* 2013: 21).

What are some of the results of the Spirit’s work? First, as suggested by Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, the Spirit connects us to the divine directly: “The Spirit works in us a oneness with God that awakens the fullness of who we are” (Martell-Otero *et al.* 2013: 22). Secondly, the Spirit “builds us up” in our inner selves “from the inside out” (Martell-Otero *et al.* 2013: 23), which relates to our inner spirituality and spiritual development as people of God. Thirdly, the Spirit uses “prophecy” to help “reexamine” tradition in the church on the basis of communal reflection on what is right and wrong for a new day (Martell-Otero *et al.* 2013: 24). This relates to the “traditioning” process discussed earlier. In Latina Protestant reflection, terms like “prophecy” and “discernment” dominate the discussion of how the Holy Spirit reveals God’s will for God’s people, especially as they gather in community worship and reflection. Discernment “from a biblical standpoint,” argues Conde-Frazier, “can be defined as making a distinction between what comes from God and what does not” (Martell-Otero *et al.* 2013: 26). Moreover, “discernment must always be concrete, contextual, and therefore provisional.” It entails “a communal endeavor” with the community of faith looking out towards the needs of the larger community. Discernment has Scripture as its foundation, posits Conde-Frazier, and the Spirit to guide it, especially as a result of decision-making in community. Spirit-led discernment produces good and not destruction since the Spirit is *ruach*, a “Life-giver” and healer (Martell-Otero *et al.* 2013: 27).

Finally, Maldonado Pérez describes how the Holy Spirit “goes native” in its contextualization of the revelation of God through the incarnation of Christ. Incarnation restores God’s creation by reminding humanity what it means to be made in the image of God (Martell-Otero *et al.* 2013: 28). “Going native,” according to Maldonado Pérez, refers to “contextualizing the gospel.” Through incarnation “God becomes one of us;” God “addresses humanity in and through what is familiar.” Beyond the incarnation of Christ, the Holy Spirit continues contextualizing God’s revelation to our reality, without

superseding God's own revelation in Christ (Martell-Otero *et al.* 2013: 28). Once "God broke through time to become incarnate," the Holy Spirit kept and keeps that from being merely a static truth. According to the Bible and church history, the Holy Spirit has a "missional" role to make available "the benefits of God's grace for all of God's children" (Martell-Otero *et al.* 2013: 31). Like other Catholic and Protestant theologians studied in this chapter, Latina Protestant women recognize the reality of sin in our lives and our world, but "the Holy Spirit's constant rumblings in us" alert us to those deficiencies and shortcomings and empower us to overcome them (Martell-Otero *et al.* 2013: 32).

This overview of the role of the Holy Spirit in making the revelation of God in Christ concrete in the ongoing life of the believing community brings greater understanding to the divine being, who is transcendent yet present. Yet how does a transcendent God become real in everyday life (*lo cotidiano*)? One final Latina theological reflection rounds out our picture of divine self-disclosure as understood in Latina/o theology.

Revelation and the transcendent God

Most theology about divine revelation assumes that a transcendent, distant God gets close to humanity, namely through Jesus Christ and Scripture. Not so, argues Latina theologian Mayra Rivera (2007). Rivera argues for a "relational transcendence" in which, yes, God is different from creation but so are we from each other. Therefore, we need a theology of otherness not sameness. This includes our understanding of transcendence and revelation (Rivera 2007: x).

Traditional theologies of transcendence, according to Rivera, present a separate and aloof God. Such a vision of the divine does not promote advocacy for change in the world. "God is irreducibly Other" and "always beyond our grasp." However, "God is not beyond our touch," argues Rivera. In fact, because God is Other, we are called to engage the human other among us. We must respect the other, not grab hold, "grasp" in a way to overcome or control, but rather "touch" in a way that respects, connects, and contacts, but does not engulf. Thus Rivera posits a "theology of relational transcendence" that envisions "ethical relationships between human beings" (Rivera 2007: 2). We must connect the divine character that is Other to human beings as different from each other yet worthy of connection.

Rivera's argument throughout her work is that God, revealed as transcendent, touches the world, humanity, in all its otherness and difference and thus reveals "intimate connections, interdependence and mutuality" (Rivera 2007: 7). The God of touch has been revealed, as exemplified in Jesus Christ, the Incarnate One, who touched many lives during his earthly existence. In Christ, we "reclaim the notion of divine transcendence for the sake of promoting social transformation" (Rivera 2007: 13). It is "a concept of 'transcendence within' creation and history," which "destabilizes the transcendence/immanence binary" (Rivera 2007: 14). Rivera argues against defining transcendence such that God becomes separate from creation, making both creation and salvation ahistorical (Rivera 2007: 41–2). With creation and salvation *in history*,

humans relate to each other with mutual connectivity, which fuels ethical relationships and actions (Rivera 2007: 42). Divine transcendence moves toward creation and humanity, not away from it (Rivera 2007: 44).

Rivera calls this “transcendence within creation” an “intracosmic transcendence” because it affirms “internal relations between God and creation” (Rivera 2007: 45). Such a notion impacts how we understand incarnation and revelation. In opposition to “radical orthodoxy,”⁸ Rivera posits that the incarnation of Jesus does not require a notion of “God’s ‘condescension,’ without which ‘there would be no revelation, only silence or ignorance’” (Rivera 2007: 45, citing Smith 2002: 160). In radical orthodoxy, “incarnation is portrayed as a downward movement, from the heights of transcendence to the lowliness of creation.” Not so in an intracosmic transcendence, in which Jesus is understood “not as the radical example of God’s condescension toward immanence, but rather as ‘the supreme form of historical transcendence’” (Rivera 2007: 45, citing Ellacuría 1993: 266). If we follow Rivera’s argument on transcendence, we must understand revelation as divine transcendence that touches humanity in historical ways. Humanity, in this understanding of transcendence and its revelation, bears the mark of divinity within in its concrete, historical reality, not “superadded to reality, but something inherent to reality” (Rivera 2007: 46).

Further, intracosmic transcendence leads human beings toward each other, not away, and therefore “to a praxis guided by that awareness of divinity in reality” (Rivera 2007: 46). Rivera calls this “theopraxy,” such that “what is received from God, revelation, is not limited to the acquisition of knowledge about God.” Rather, God and humanity collaborate for a transcendence that transforms because “reality [is] life in God” (Rivera 2007: 47). Theology, including a theology of revelation, must bear witness to “the experience of God in history.” Theology should not be about abstract concepts but about real people in our “finite existence.” We must do theology based on human experience, history and culture without creating boundaries between our material and spiritual existence (Rivera 2007: 48).

Theology, including a theology of revelation, must connect the dots between “dogmatic themes and history” (Rivera 2007: 48). It is not just a matter of the history of Christian thought: what does theology want to accomplish in history? What is revelation for? I agree with Mayra Rivera that God-talk, whether on the matter of transcendence or revelation, without historical implications and action falls short of the divine initiative. Rivera asserts that God is transcendent by being present, not absent (Rivera 2007: 51, citing Ellacuría 1993: 255).

Indeed, “the movement of transcendence” is toward transformation (Rivera 2007: 53). Rivera’s theology of transcendence has ethical implications. “The processes by which human needs are met,” whether feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, practicing love, or transforming society, are inherent in “a transcendence ... already taking place in creation” (Rivera 2007: 54). We encounter transcendence in the “face of the other” (Rivera 2007: 55). Responsibility toward the poor is an integral part of the encounter with God, indeed the “primary moment” of revelation (Rivera 2007: 71). This includes body-to-body encounters that entail, as with Christ, “nativity, rebirth,

transformation" (Rivera 2007: 85). Thus, Rivera argues at length for the notion of embodiment in our theology of transcendence.⁹ Rather than re-inscribe "transcendence as a journey from nature to God, from body to spirit, from an irreducible birth to an absolute creation – from Eros to justice," we need "to prevent the body from becoming detached from its words" (Rivera 2007: 87). The "summons to the responsibility" that is "the word of God" calls for our bodies as well as our souls (Rivera 2007: 88). After all, is not the ultimate "word of God" – the incarnation of Christ – a "work of flesh," which is not unconnected from world and universe, given that stable, ass, ox, clouds, and star were engaged (Rivera 2007: 92–3)? Yes, God is the "wholly Other," which means "ungraspable." However, God is also "somehow present in the human other" (Rivera 2007: 113).

In short, Mayra Rivera helps us see a theology of transcendence and a theology of revelation that takes seriously God as intimately present with the "human other," and because of that we are called not to "possess" our fellow human beings, but touch and transform them. "Theology shall seek to be touched by that which transcends it and, in the process, transform itself" (Rivera 2007: 128). How does Latino/a theological reflection on revelation, such as we have seen in this chapter, seek to transform our understanding of theology and of divine self-disclosure? I offer some thoughts on this question in my concluding remarks.

Conclusion: Toward a Latino/a Ecumenical Theology of Revelation

We must ask how we can bring these Latino/a Roman Catholic and Protestant reflections on a theology of revelation in touch with each other. In an essay on the theme of *sola scriptura* in Latino/a Protestant hermeneutics (Agosto 2009), I suggested that the Reformation focus on the Scriptures as the vehicle of divine revelation did not definitively displace from Protestant minds and practice the value of tradition and human experience as loci for God's self-disclosure as well. I argued that Latino/a Roman Catholic and Protestant reflection on revelation have much more in common than not. In fact, many of the common elements I highlighted in that essay we have seen referenced in the preceding discussion. For example, all our commentators write about the importance of human experience and the need for conversation and dialogue about that experience, particularly in community contexts, in order to understand how God has been revealed in the midst of our diversity and transcendence. Several commentators also emphasized the importance of culture, in this case Latino/a culture, as a vehicle of divine revelation. How else could God connect to the human experience if not through culture in all its variety?

Thus, as several of our interlocutors emphasized, revelation must be described as a contextual act, not a matter of universality. God chooses to reveal God-self in particularities, not absolute abstraction. The experience of divine transcendence in human life – indeed, daily life, *lo cotidiano* – counts more than a delineation of the attributes of God that tend to distance God from human experience. Latino/a reflection on the

Triune God emphasizes this dialogical, relational aspect of God. Indeed, for most Latino/a theologians, the theology of the Trinity is an exemplum of our focus on relational theology that is best exercised in community, also known as *teología en conjunto*.¹⁰

Finally, Latina/a theologians remind us that the incarnation of Christ, the ultimate statement of divine revelation in Christian theology and Scripture, is about embodiment. Any theology, including a theology of revelation, which incorporates *latinidad* engages matters of Latino/a identity, whether social, political, religious, national/ethnic, or the physical realities of gender and corporality, including *mestizaje* and *mulatez*. These are not just peripheral matters to constructing theology but fundamental, not just for Latino/a theology but for all. And because our theology of revelation is about embodiment and “face-to-face,” “body-to-body” human encounters, ethical parameters must be in play. We care about theology, including revelation, because theology moves us – or should move us – to action. Body, mind, and spirit, all reflective of God’s self-disclosure in Christ and Scripture, need to be on the front line of the human experience and transformation for the reflection and the revelation to mean something, especially because it means something to God.

Notes

- 1 Conservative evangelical scholars tend not to grant a major role to culture in divine revelation, given the vicissitudes of human experience: “Experience alone is quite insufficient as a basis for theology and apologetics, for the experience may be divine, demonic or merely human in origin” (Pinnock 1971: 25). Yet does not the incarnation itself, as the ultimate means of revelation, point to human experience as the vehicle God chooses to reveal the divine love for creation? See discussion of incarnation and Christ later in this chapter.
- 2 But see my essay in response to Ruiz (Agosto 2009), in which I suggest that even the Reformers who argued for *sola scriptura* wanted to connect Scripture as the source of revelation to human experience and tradition. It is a matter of emphasis, not one over against the other.
- 3 See Espín (1997: especially 63–8) for discussion of *sensus fidelium* in Latino/a popular religiosity.
- 4 This, of course, goes against the ideas of many Protestant evangelical scholars when they argue, for example, “Now the Bible and revelation have been wrenched apart with devastating results for theology and faith” (Pinnock 1971: 22) and “For Christians the primordial revelation is that contained in the Bible” (Morris 1976: 69).
- 5 Several Latino/a theologians have suggested this, including, among Protestants, González (1990: 101–15); Chávez Saucedo (1997: 22–32); and Martell-Otero, Maldonado Pérez, and Conde-Frazier (2013: 52–72).
- 6 Espín argues specifically that people of faith confront divine revelation in three basic ways: the Bible, the tradition, and their “faith-full intuitions” in historical, cultural, and religious contexts. With regard to the Bible, personal and communal interpretations of revelation must cohere with the Scriptures, at the same time that experience of divine revelation cannot be limited to those Scriptures. See Espín (1997: 67).

- 7 Co-author with Loida Martell Otero and Elizabeth Conde-Frazier of *Latina Evangélicas* (2013), although various sections of the book are designated as written by one or the other, which I have indicated in the text of the chapter, when appropriate.
- 8 Rivera explores radical orthodoxy at length in Chapter 2, "Radical Transcendence?" (2007: 17–38).
- 9 In particular in Chapter 5, "Transcendence in the Flesh of the Other" (Rivera 2007: 83–97).
- 10 Exemplified by the volume edited by Rodríguez and Martell-Otero (1997).

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CHAPTER 6

The Bible and Latino/a Theology

Jean-Pierre Ruiz

In the early 1990s, Cuban American Roman Catholic biblical scholar Fernando E. Segovia mapped the place of the Bible in US Latina/o theology in an essay that appeared in a volume entitled *We are a People! Initiatives in Hispanic American Theology* (Segovia 1992). There he offered an analysis of the reading strategies vis-à-vis the Bible employed by several Latino/a theologians who were not trained as professional biblical critics (church historian Justo L. González, pastoral theologian Virgilio Elizondo, Christian ethicist Ada María Isasi-Díaz, and scholar of church and society Harold Recinos). The title of the book in which Segovia's essay appeared is an energetic affirmation of the distinctiveness of theologies that were beginning to emerge in the work of scholars who identified themselves not as Latin Americans but as members of various Latin American diasporic communities in the US, and as heirs of a complex history with its roots in the colonial era (Ruiz 1999). In a study published four years later, Segovia turned his attention to the work of three Latino specialists in biblical studies (Mexican American Roman Catholic C. Gilbert Romero, New York-born Puerto Rican Roman Catholic Jean-Pierre Ruiz, and Cuban American Presbyterian Francisco García-Treto), moving forward to begin the project of mapping Latina/o diasporic hermeneutics and intercultural criticism (Segovia 1996).

It is highly significant that in 2014 Segovia served as president of the Society of Biblical Literature, the world's largest scholarly society devoted to the advancement of academic biblical studies. It is equally significant that in 2010 he was invited to deliver the opening plenary address at the annual convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America, a presentation in which he offered an incisive analysis of the complex entanglements of theology and biblical interpretation from the 1970s to the present, decades which have seen significant changes in the landscape of biblical

studies. The well-deserved recognition of this important scholar's major contributions should not be misconstrued to suggest by any means that Latino/a biblical interpretation has moved from the margins to the mainstream. Segovia's 1994 presidential address at the annual colloquium of the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States (ACHTUS) was entitled "Theological Education and Scholarship as Struggle: The Life of Racial/Ethnic Minorities in the Profession" (Segovia 1994). While Segovia himself would agree that this struggle continues even over twenty years later, inasmuch as Latina/o biblical and theological scholarship continues to be relegated – more often than not – to the outer edges of academe as just one subset of a growing variety of "contextual" approaches that are tolerated only to the extent that they do not call too much attention to the minoritizing practices that maintain the distance between center and margins.

Because Segovia (2009) is both the foremost cartographer of the landscape of Latina/o biblical interpretation and a skilled untangler of the complex entanglements of biblical studies and theology (Segovia 2010; also Ruiz 2011: 13–53), what follows does not simply revisit the same territory. It is intended to be suggestive rather than comprehensive in scope. I begin by considering several key characteristics of biblical interpretation done *latinamente*, recognizing my own personal and professional location as a site from which it became important for me to engage in this practice. I then sketch one example of what such interpretation looks like in practice, and I conclude with some considerations of challenges that lie ahead.

Crafting *Convivencia* in the Kitchen

Whether it was a matter of God's grace or simple circumstance or a curious combination of the two, when my parents joined tens of thousands of others in the so-called great migration of the 1950s from Puerto Rico to New York desperately seeking employment, my father succeeded in finding work as a cook. He did not earn his keep preparing the savory Caribbean dishes on which he had been raised. Instead, at the kosher delicatessen where he worked, Central and Eastern European comfort foods were the menu of the day. What was my Puerto Rican *papi* doing slicing pastrami and hauling gallons of chicken noodle soup to bar mitzvah banquets? Now as then, it is Latin American immigrants who work long hours for low wages washing the dishes and scrubbing the pots, bussing the tables, peeling the potatoes, and mopping the floors of New York's restaurants to make ends meet for themselves and their families. While the Puerto Rican accents of a few decades ago may have given way to Mexican and Central American inflections, the virtual sign on the kitchen door should still read "Aquí se habla Español," "Spanish spoken here."

My father wanted his sons to learn their B-C-D's – baseball, cooking, and dancing, that is. As for baseball, I am a lifelong New York Mets fan, having grown up within walking distance of their home field, Shea Stadium. As for dancing, I am no stranger to salsa, and I am versatile enough to be almost as fluent in merengue. Yet it is cooking

where I would really make my father proud. I might even boast that some of my best work as a biblical scholar and theologian took place in the kitchen of Wabash Avenue Presbyterian Church in Crawfordsville, Indiana. There, under the auspices of the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion, a dozen or so Latino and Latina colleagues teaching biblical studies, theology, and religion at colleges, seminaries, and universities from the United States and Puerto Rico gathered to reflect on effective pedagogical practices by transforming that kitchen into a classroom, an experience we called “*convivencia* in the kitchen.” We learned from each other how to cook the comfort foods of our Latin American roots and then sat down together to savor both the wonderful flavors and the wisdom of our work with regard to the hands-on dynamics of teaching and learning. Much can be learned about teaching biblical studies and theology from sharing with someone else the fine points of preparing Cuban-style rice and beans. We shared not only food but *convivencia* – an expression that does not easily translate into English because it is more than mere fellowship or just living together. It bears with it the rich history of seven hundred years of *convivencia* by Muslims, Jews, and Christians in medieval Iberia (Menocal 2002).

What does cooking have to do with biblical interpretation? Let me insist that it is more than a colorful detail of this author’s own social location, and that it has a great deal to do with what it means to engage in biblical interpretation *latinamente* as a matter of taking lived daily experience seriously (Nanko-Fernández 2010: 25–8). If I might be allowed to milk the cooking metaphor just a bit more, I will confess that I have always been very reluctant to follow a recipe without any sort of improvisation. I am my father’s son in that regard: for him it was a pinch of this, a pinch of that, a little more of this and maybe not so much of that, until it all came out just right. Moving that metaphor from the kitchen to the library, I would suggest that there are no recipes for engaging in biblical interpretation *latinamente*, no cookbooks or television programs where the top chefs of this craft share their secrets and offer inside tips and shortcuts. Yes, there are books about form criticism and redaction criticism, about rhetorical criticism and ideological criticism, about method in biblical exegesis as it has been conventionally framed, but one cannot enroll in the Culinary Institute of America to learn to serve up interpretations that are sautéed or seasoned *latinamente*. In terms of the institutional demographics of doctoral programs in biblical studies, and in light of an academic culture in which doctoral studies amount to a sort of apprenticeship under the guidance of an established practitioner, there are precious few opportunities for aspiring Latino/a biblical scholars to work under the guidance of a Latino/a *Doktorvater* or *Doktormutter*.

I (for one) did not learn to practice biblical interpretation *latinamente* in graduate school, although in retrospect I can recognize that the seeds for it were sown during those years, seeds that took quite some time to germinate. My doctoral dissertation, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse: The Transformation of Prophetic Language in Revelation 16:17–19:10* was a complex and lengthy exercise of philological, literary, and theological erudition, but it was not an example of biblical interpretation done *latinamente*, whether intentionally or otherwise (Ruiz 1989). I muse at what led me to focus on those two

exotic and enigmatic portions of the biblical canon, Ezekiel and the Apocalypse. I have found myself returning often to these two texts and these two towering figures – the priest who found himself called to prophesy among his fellow deportees far from Jerusalem, and the seer who from a vantage point on Patmos “because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (Revelation 1:9) shared his visions with minoritized members of the Jesus movement who were inhabitants of seven cities of the Roman province of Asia.

Curiously enough, it was during my years as a graduate student that I first became acquainted with the work of Cuban American biblical scholar Fernando Segovia, more specifically with the published version of his University of Notre Dame doctoral dissertation, *Love Relationships in the Johannine Tradition: Agapē/Agapan in I John and the Fourth Gospel* (Segovia 1982). As Segovia himself would readily admit, that work from early in his career did not by any means represent an instance of biblical interpretation done *latinamente*. I mention my first encounter with Segovia’s published dissertation here in light of his subsequent and very deliberate moves toward committed and contextually explicit scholarship, and because of the candor with which he reflects on his own experience as a Latino biblical scholar who is *both* born and made (Segovia 2000: 145–56; Ruiz 2011: 35–40). A table-talk episode he shares is substantial food for thought:

Quite recently, at dinner at a committee meeting of one of the various professional societies to which I belong, I happened to sit next to a well-known and established scholar. This was a gentleman, many years my senior, perfectly cast in the social mold of the traditional learned scholar – the *homo eruditus* oblivious to and distrustful of matters theoretical, with a view of all theory as outside the realm of history; largely unaware of as well as unconcerned by any major shifts in either discipline or academy; thoroughly self-absorbed in his own work. After speaking at length about his most recent accomplishments, he asked unexpectedly about my own research interests. When I explained my growing interest in the competing ideologies of the early Christian texts in the face of the Roman imperial situation that they faced and within which they had been produced, he asked politely whether I thought such a connection was really important. When I responded that I thought the connection was not only important for the ancient world but also for both the modern world and the contemporary world, since the development of criticism had paralleled the imperial expansion, contraction, and transformation of Europe and the United States, he discreetly dropped any further inquiries about my work and proceeded to outline at considerable length his own research agenda for the future. (Segovia 2000: 152–3)

It was only when I returned to the United States, thousands of miles from the hospitably international climate of Rome’s Gregorian University, and when I first involved myself – degree in hand and appropriately credentialed – in the professional life of the academy, that I became acutely conscious of the complex and pluriform minoritizations that I would face as a Latino biblical scholar. It came, on the one hand, from people who thought that “someone like me” shouldn’t waste my time bothering with academic pursuits since – according to them – what I really needed to do was to work directly with “my people.” Another sort of minoritization came from the gatekeepers of academe,

who actively patrolled the borders of biblical studies to keep the discipline safe from the incursions of those who would threaten the supposed objectivity of its historical and literary critical analyses. Woe to the flesh-and-blood, socially located readers of the Bible whose real world concerns are far from the artificial cares of the implied reader who bleeds only the uncoagulated jargon of the literary critic!

Following up on Segovia's table-talk anecdote, I vividly recall an incident from early in my career, the first time I attended the annual meeting of a particular scholarly society. Having dutifully purchased a ticket to the society's awards banquet, I shyly made my way to an empty seat at one of the tables toward the back of the large room. Because of the borderlands location of the city where the convention took place that year, the local organizers had taken great care to plan with the event caterers for a menu that featured Mexican cuisine that would be appealing to non-Mexican palates. Never having met any of the other members who were seated at the table with me, I proceeded to introduce myself all around as a new member of the society. I was taken by surprise when one senior member who happened to be at the table greeted me enthusiastically, "I am *so* glad that you are here." For an instant I felt welcome, but that happy moment evaporated altogether too soon when he added, "that way you can explain to us just what we are going to be eating." With all the restraint I could muster, I did my best to be my father's polite son, explaining that Mexican cuisine is quite different from Puerto Rican cuisine. With that, my tablemate turned away with a frown and went on to converse with others at the table, not addressing another word in my direction for the rest of what turned out to be an uncomfortably long evening.

It is thanks to my friendship and collaboration with Latino/a biblical scholars and theologians that I have continued to keep on stirring the pot of *sancocho* in spite of it all. ACHTUS has long provided a hospitable and stimulating space for biblical scholars and theologians to work closely together. Nourished in that environment and challenged by the freshness of my colleagues' thinking, I have become convinced of how important it is to interpret the Bible *latinamente* (Orobator 2008; Méndez Montoya 2012). *Sancocho* is a typically Caribbean stew, known by that name in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, and called *ajiaco* in Cuba. While every cook and every family has a secret recipe, the indispensable ingredients are the inexpensive, unglamorous, and ubiquitous root vegetables that are longstanding staples of the poor. The longer the *sancocho* simmers, the better it tastes, and somehow it always seems that there's enough left in the pot to feed one more hungry person who needs a place at the table.

As that image simmers, let me describe some of the ingredients that go into biblical interpretation done *latinamente*, being careful to insist that this is only one cook's way of going about it. If *sancocho* is on the menu, then we are talking about root vegetables, the simple, solid, staples that are indispensable. Keeping things simple, I will stick to three key elements. First, biblical interpretation done *latinamente* is collaborative. Second, biblical interpretation done *latinamente* is connected. Finally, biblical interpretation done *latinamente* is committed. Let me touch briefly on each of these three, and then I will revisit two old friends – the priest Ezekiel and the prophet John – to ponder what I have learned about reading them in the years I have been working at reading *latinamente*.

Collaborative

First, I would like to suggest that biblical interpretation done *latinamente* is collaborative. Over decades that have seen the beginnings and now the flourishing of Latino/a theologies in the United States, *teología de conjunto* has emerged as a phrase that aptly captures the process and the product of our work both in biblical studies and in the other dimensions of theological investigation and education. Resisting the individualism that is among the defining characteristics of academe, *teología de conjunto* maintains that the work of biblical interpretation and the work of theology is less about *me* than it is about *us*. Partly as a survival strategy of the minoritized (for whom coalition building and the cultivation of allies is vital), and partly as a matter of the practice of solidarity, the deliberate practice of *teología de conjunto* has likewise had the salutary benefit of breaking down the walls that usually keep biblical scholars, theologians, religious ethicists, and so forth isolated within our own disciplinary reservations. Such collaboration has likewise kept denominational differences from getting in the way of our work. Thus, for example, both Catholic and Protestant Latino/a biblical scholars and theologians worked together to produce *Building Bridges, Doing Justice: Constructing a Latino/a Ecumenical Theology* (Espín 2009). That impetus toward intentionally collaborative engagement likewise nourished efforts by Latino/a, African American, and Asian American biblical scholars to work together in a sustained and challenging effort that resulted in the volume entitled *They Were All Together in One Place? Toward Minority Biblical Criticism* (Bailey, Liew, and Segovia 2009).

Connected

Second, I would like to suggest that biblical interpretation done *latinamente* is *connected*. In that respect, it takes lived daily experience, *la vida cotidiana*, as a primary point of reference. It would be mistaken to suggest that this implies a preferential option for so-called “popular” or “grassroots” biblical interpretation. It does help to keep in focus the salutary caution that professionally trained biblical scholars in the academy do not hold sole and exclusive access to the biblical text and its significance. It is to this misconstrued job description of “scientific” (meaning academic) exegesis that the Pontifical Biblical Commission (1993) applies the woe pronounced in Luke 11:52, “You have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering.”¹

What I meant by the connectedness to lived daily experience that characterizes biblical interpretation can easily be explained by taking note of the book by David Sánchez, *From Patmos to the Barrio: Subverting Imperial Myths*, published in 2008. In this study, the murals of Our Lady of Guadalupe that are a ubiquitous part of the twenty-first-century streetscape of East Los Angeles provide a standpoint from which to interrogate the first-century reality of the Roman province of Asia, and the ways in which the “woman clothed with the sun” of Revelation 12 functioned to challenge the dominant

imperial worldview. He likewise examines the ways in which Luis Laso de la Vega's seventeenth-century narrative about Our Lady of Guadalupe deftly subverted the imperial mythology of the Spanish colonizers of Mexico, a reconfiguration which has had a long-lasting impact on Mexican and Mexican American self-understandings. Reading late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century mural art to make sense of complex first-century apocalyptic symbolism and its history of reception into the colonial period and beyond – this is what I mean when I refer to the connectedness of biblical interpretation done *latinamente*, to the ways in which this approach is bound up with the lived daily experience of Latinos and Latinas in all of its complexity and in its various expressions.

Committed

Commitment is a third key ingredient in the richly textured *sancocho* that is biblical interpretation done *latinamente*. This important ingredient foregrounds the role of the biblical scholar as a public intellectual. Given the prominent and persuasive role that the Bible continues to play both in the pulpit and in the public square across the United States, biblical scholars cannot take sanctuary in our libraries as though we were innocent bystanders in the public debate of matters of great urgency and consequence.

Latina/o biblical scholars owe much to Latin American theologies of liberation, embracing the important alliance that such theologies recognize and reverence between epistemology and ethics, between knowing and doing, between interpretation and the effects of interpretation. That alliance revolves around the liberationist principle of the preferential option for the poor, more broadly stated as the preferential option for the marginalized, the disenfranchised, and the minoritized. In other words, those who find themselves on the edges not because they have chosen to inhabit the edges but because they have been pushed – even shoved – to the edges. Who has been doing the shoving? The “invisible hand” of free-market capitalism, the nameless multi-form forces of the phenomena we neatly identify as globalization, and the usual suspects of war and the countless other ways in which human beings violate the bodies and the spirits, the souls and the very dignity of our fellow human beings.

By suggesting that *commitment* is a third important ingredient in biblical interpretation done *latinamente*, I am insisting on the way in which the interpretive task is driven, animated, and nourished by the ethical imperative to side with those brothers and sisters in the human family who have been shoved to the very edges of society, often to the very edge of survival, including those whose lives are at risk simply because they dare to cross an imaginary line in the sand of the Sonoran desert, trying to make their way across the border from Mexico to the United States. The work of Guatemalan American biblical scholar M. D. Carroll Rodas is an especially clear example of biblical scholarship that takes this sort of commitment very seriously. A well-respected scholar of the book of Amos, his book *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible* is an important and strategically deft contribution to this important matter being debated in the public square. Carroll explains,

My intention is to try to move Christians to reconsider their starting point in the immigration debate. Too often discussions default to the passionate ideological arguments, economic wrangling, or racial sentiments that dominate national discourse. Among Christians, my experience has been that there is little awareness of what might be a divine viewpoint on immigration. It is neither exhaustive nor comprehensive. Rather, it is designed as a primer for a more biblically and theologically informed approach to the topic. (Carroll R. 2013: 19–20)

Christians at the Border is not the sort of work of academic biblical interpretation that would be likely to earn its author an invitation to deliver a plenary lecture at the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament's annual gathering, for it is blissfully free of the inaccessible and gratuitous polysyllabic verbiage that passes for erudition in so many scholarly venues where biblical scholars gather to talk shop. But – if it is still possible these days to talk about authorial intention – that was not what Carroll had in mind when he wrote this book. Together with other biblical scholars engaged in the practice of biblical interpretation that is committed to justice, he recognized how powerful a resource the Bible could be in shaping the consciences of those who can make a difference on behalf of those who live their daily lives ever so precariously on the edges.

Without pretending to offer a simple recipe, I have briefly sketched three features – collaboration, connectedness, and commitment – that I regard as important characteristics of biblical interpretation done *latinamente*. One might protest that “this doesn't sound Hispanic,” and in many ways that would be true. While these are *characteristic* ingredients of biblical interpretation done *latinamente*, Latina/o interpreters of the Bible do not lay exclusive claim to collaboration, connectedness, commitment, or any combination of these three ingredients, nor do we even claim to have invented them. In fact, many of us would heartily recommend all three of these root vegetables, so to speak, as healthy parts of any sort of biblical interpretation, and all of them are available to biblical interpreters from *any* background. Who, then, are the intended audiences for biblical interpretation done *latinamente*? Framed in other words, for whose ears is this work intended and for whose sake is it undertaken? To suggest that it is done *by* Latinos and Latinas for the sake of other Latinas and Latinos could be construed as a narrow-minded discourse of identity politics on the one hand, or, worse still, as a matter of resigned acquiescence to the minoritization that disempowers and disenfranchises Latinos and Latinas in the United States, effectively keeping us at the edges. While, with Fernando Segovia, I would continue to insist that those who engage in biblical interpretation *latinamente* are born and *reborn* as a matter of deliberately claiming the particularity, that is, “community ties, marginalized status, and minoritarian agenda” bound up with “the givenness of a social location at the edges,” I would also insist – as he would too – that biblical interpretation is done *latinamente* not just for the sake of other Latinos and Latinas (Segovia 2009: 200–1).

I would go on to propose that what some have called the scandal of particularity might help us to consider how interpreting the Bible *latinamente* takes place for the

sake of the whole church and not just for congregations whose worship is in Spanish, and for the sake of the whole of society and not merely for the benefit of a specific ethnic constituency. Thus God chose to enter into covenant with Israel. According to Deuteronomy 7:6–8,

You are a people holy to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession. It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the LORD set his heart on you and chose you – for you were the fewest of all peoples. It was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

If the Servant of Second Isaiah is to be understood as a reference to Israel that emphasizes Israel's mission, then the purpose of particularity is suggested by Isaiah 49:6:

It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.

The Fourth Gospel's proclamation of the incarnation can also be understood in terms of the scandal of particularity, for the Logos became flesh in space and time in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, a first-century Galilean Jew:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:16–17)

What of the particularity of the Bible itself? Amos Elon writes,

The Bible ... unlike the books of other ancient peoples, was ... the literature of a minor, remote people – and not the literature of its rulers, but of its critics. The scribes and the prophets of Jerusalem refused to accept the world as it was. They invented the literature of political dissent and, with it, the literature of hope. (Elon 1995: 19; see also Rivera-Pagán 2014)

The Bible itself, then, can be understood as literature *written* from the edges. If it can be said that particularity is a grace rather than a scandal, in other words if it can be affirmed that God's particular predilection for people on the edges makes a difference for all human beings, then perhaps biblical interpretation done *latinamente* is one (among many) ways of appreciating the creative convergences between God's action in particular circumstances with the universal breadth of God's life-giving and life-restoring will.

You Are What You Eat: Another Look at Ezekiel and the Apocalypse

I have continued to ponder what led me to take such a sustained interest in Ezekiel and the Apocalypse, yet I have found that this interest has lingered and even strengthened with the passing of time. In writing my doctoral dissertation I discovered the vast extent of their literary kinship, with John's Apocalypse reappropriating and recasting much of the language of Ezekiel. John from his vantage point on Patmos and Ezekiel among the exiles in Babylon, both so far from a Jerusalem that imperial armies (first Babylonian and then Roman) had twice reduced to ruins, shared their visions of a new Jerusalem restored even beyond the glory of their memories. In what follows I offer for consideration a text from Ezekiel that is reappropriated and redeployed in John's Apocalypse, a text that might be said to symbolize the translation of word into flesh, an incarnation of sorts whereby the word is embodied in the very person of the prophet.

In Ezekiel 2:8–3:3, a portion of the prophet's commissioning, we read:

You, mortal, hear what I say to you; do not be rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you. I looked, and a hand was stretched out to me, and a written scroll was in it. He spread it before me; it had writing on the front and on the back, and written on it were words of lamentation and mourning and woe. He said to me, O mortal, eat what is offered to you; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel. So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. He said to me, Mortal, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it. Then I ate it; and in my mouth it was as sweet as honey.

Centuries later, Revelation 10:8–11 very explicitly took up this motif as part of the renewal of John's prophetic commissioning:

Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me again, saying, "Go, take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land." So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll; and he said to me, "Take it, and eat; it will be bitter to your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth." So I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it; it was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter. Then they said to me, "You must prophesy again about many peoples and nations and languages and kings."

In an article entitled "Exilic and Post-Exilic Prophecy and the Orality/Literacy Problem," Joachim Schaper considers biblical texts where the human technology of writing is projected onto the deity, that is, texts said to be written by God. He likewise considers prophetic texts which consider writing as a human activity. Ezekiel 2:8–3:3,

however (together with Zechariah 5:1–4), belongs to a third category, namely, “passages that depict divine writing as bridging the gap between the divine and human spheres” (Schaper 2005: 331).

Schaper observes:

Probably the most remarkable thing about both these passages is that the respective prophets are eclipsed by the divine writing. As E.F. Davies [*sic*] aptly puts it with regard to Ezekiel, “[t]he prophet who swallowed the scroll becomes (to our eyes, at least) virtually indistinguishable from what he ate. Adapting his speech to the form of a permanent record, the person of the speaker recedes behind the stability and prominence of the concretised word.” The book of Ezekiel then relates the written word Ezekiel has eaten to the spoken word he is supposed to announce to his fellow Judaeans ... So the prophet is first given the written word, which then has to be transformed into the spoken word. (Schaper 2005: 331–2, citing Davis 1989: 135)

Contra Schaper (and Davis), I would contend that in Ezekiel 2:8–3:3 the prophet is *not* eclipsed by the divine writing he ingests. Instead it is the divine writing that becomes incarnate, so to speak, in the very particularity of the prophet, who by assimilating the scroll into himself becomes an embodied message to his fellow exiles. This is borne out by the symbolic actions that are especially characteristic of the book of Ezekiel, the instances of what amounts to street theater where the prophet acts out the oracles he is commissioned to deliver (Ruiz 2011: 71–82, 83–99). It is the very particularity of Ezekiel’s immediate circumstances that provides the script for the prophet’s packing an exile’s baggage and digging a hole through the wall in the sight of his Judean audience. Thus, the prophetic oracle is delivered first as performance and then in the written narrative that makes this performance available for subsequent generations of readers and hearers in ways that do not erase the particularity of the prophet’s vivid embodiment, an embodiment that amounts to an interpretation of the (symbolically) swallowed scroll. Thus, if you will, the swallowing of the scroll serves as a metaphor for contextualization, for reading *as*/reading *in* the specific circumstances of the Judeans exiled to Babylon.

If the reappropriation of Ezekiel 2:8–3:3 in Revelation 10:8–11 can be understood as an interpretation and re-actualization of this text from the exilic prophet, it serves to further confirm my intuition. It should be noted that Revelation 10 – midway through the book – is not the seer’s inaugural vision. Commentators often refer to it as a renewal of the seer’s prophetic commission, who is instructed in verse 8 that he “must prophesy *again*.” In the inaugural vision, during which John finds himself “on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (Revelation 1:9), he is ordered “Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.” The seer’s inaugural vision thus includes a command to write and to send from his vantage point on Patmos, to readers and hearers who are at a distance from his location on Patmos. In chapter 10, John is not commanded

to write. He is instead commanded to swallow the scroll. He becomes what he eats: consuming the words he is then commanded to prophesy. The bittersweet word becomes flesh in the person of the seer-prophet summoned to do much more than write. In effect the words of prophecy he was to deliver were written in the particularity of his person.

While much more could be said about the scroll-swallowing priest in exile and about the scroll-swallowing seer who found himself on Patmos, I mention them because, in effect, both Ezekiel and John became embodied, contextualized, socially located, and engaged interpreters of the prophetic words that became part of them. By becoming what they ate they moved interpretation from the abstract and objective to the concrete and quotidian. Ezekiel the prophet to the exiles and John the seer were both figures who found themselves on the edges, marginalized and minoritized by the powers that were. Ezekiel, the priest who found himself far from the ruins of the temple as he sat among his fellow deportees “by the rivers of Babylon,” shared visions of a God whose throne was transported by wings and wheels. John identified himself as “your brother who share with you in Jesus the persecution and the kingdom and the patient endurance” (Revelation 1:9) as he addressed fellow members of the nascent Jesus movement at the end of the first century CE. Living as a minoritized population in the urban centers of the Roman province of Asia, far from Rome yet subject to the empire’s wide-ranging power and propaganda, theirs was the uneasy existence of being *in* but not *of* the world. John urged them against assimilation, against yielding to the overwhelming temptation to fit in and thereby surrender the distinctiveness of their commitment and their witness to Jesus – the Lamb slaughtered by the power of Rome but raised to glory by the power of God.

I mention the unusual menu that was set before Ezekiel and John not because either of them anticipates the practice of biblical interpretation *latinamente* many centuries ahead of its time, but because in some sense each furnishes an appropriate icon of the scandal of particularity vis-à-vis biblical interpretation. Neither the exilic prophet nor the Christian seer interpreted the text at a distance. Neither can even be said to be a mere *reader* of the text set before him. Instead the heavenly texts became intimately part of their specific flesh-and-blood contexts, becoming incarnate, as it were, even in their persons inasmuch as they were nourished by the Word of God. When they consumed the text, they did not disappear, leaving only footprints of ink. The word that nourished them was shaped into meaning for their readers and hearers by their own particularity, finding expression in what they said and what they did.

If what I have suggested about Ezekiel and John makes sense, then it may be the case that taking the Bible seriously resituates *all* of its readers at the edges, to particularities that lead to unexpected encounters with a God who speaks all of our languages, whether written, spoken, or enacted. Christians make the claim that the living God chose to offer life to the world by becoming vulnerable among us as one of us, collaborating with us, connected to us, and committed to us. The same God invites us to take and eat, to be nourished and to be challenged by the Word of life, which connects us all to each other and calls us to recommit ourselves to the work of God’s justice in the world.

What Next?

If commitment and connectedness can be said to be characteristic of Latina/o biblical interpretation, and if biblical interpretation practiced *latinamente* is to be something more than an academic pastime, it must be recognized that current demographic trends signal an urgent imperative for Latino/a biblical scholars and theologians. For instance, in March 2014, Latinos/as became the ethnic majority in California, rising to 39 percent of the population and overtaking the 38.8 percent who identify as white non-Hispanics (Lopez 2014). At the same time, looking at nationwide trends, Hosffman Ospino explains that while

In the early 1980s it was estimated that 15 percent of all Catholic parishes served Hispanics, mostly in Spanish. Hispanics constituted about 25 percent of the entire Catholic population in the United States. Three decades later, when Hispanic Catholics are about 40 percent of the approximately 78 million Catholics in the country, 25 percent of all Catholic parishes intentionally serve Hispanics. (Ospino 2014: 14)

Furthermore, because just and comprehensive reform of immigration law and policy remains such an urgent priority, the work of engaged biblical scholars like M. Daniel Carroll R. remains vitally important as he and others appeal to the consciences of those whose values and decisions are shaped by the Bible. In light of these pressing considerations, these concluding remarks will focus on two questions: who is doing the work of Latino/a biblical interpretation, and what work still needs to be done. Here as before, it is my intention to be suggestive rather than comprehensive, to identify only a very few items on what is surely a much longer list of priorities.

Who?

With respect to the first question, regarding who is (and who is not) engaged in the work of Latino/a biblical interpretation, Jacqueline M. Hidalgo points to one especially worrisome question: “Why are there comparatively few US Latinas with PhDs in biblical studies?” She goes on to explain:

Scholarly practices may rely upon a politics of reading that remains a politics of authorization – a narrow approach invested in perpetuating kyriarchal power structures both within and outside the academy. If a politics of reading serves as a politics of authorization perpetuating unjust power structures and if the narrow canons of biblical studies and religious studies scholarship exclude texts, reading practices, and other aspects of most US Latina communities, then it is no wonder that so few US Latinas pursue a PhD in biblical studies. (Hidalgo 2013: 120–1)

Thus, opening up spaces where, in Hidalgo's words, "US Latinas may study the questions, texts, practices, or issues that matter to many potential US Latina biblical scholars and their communities" (Hidalgo 2013: 121) is an urgent priority if we are serious about commitment and connectedness as characteristics and ethical touchstones of Latino/a practices of biblical interpretation. Here too the circle needs to be drawn broadly, open to participation not only to (potential) Latina biblical scholars, but also to Latinas in constructive theology and in other disciplines that take religious practices, values, and beliefs seriously. In that respect, the project directed by C. Randall Bailey, Tat-siong Benny Liew, and Fernando F. Segovia – that resulted in the publication of *They Were All Together in One Place? Toward Minority Biblical Criticism* – can serve as an instructive example of inclusivity, inasmuch as the project included African American, Asian American, and US Latino biblical scholars, on the one hand, and three scholar-interlocutors from other disciplines – Asian American culture studies specialist James Kyun-Jin Lee, African American Christian education specialist Evelyn Parker, and Puerto Rican constructive theologian Mayra Rivera Rivera – on the other. Here too, though, as Fernando Segovia admits, the organizers' aim for equal representation – four biblical scholars from each group, two in Hebrew Bible and two in early Christian studies, two men, and two women – fell short with respect to the Latino contingent, which included only three and all of whom were male (Francisco García-Treto, Jean-Pierre Ruiz, and Fernando F. Segovia) (Bailey *et al.* 2009: 366–8).

What?

If the collaborative process of *teología de conjunto* is to remain a characteristic and an ethical imperative for Latina/o practitioners of biblical interpretation, the solid ground of ecumenical cooperation needs to be pursued still further. In this respect, the essays *en conjunto* that appear in *Building Bridges: Doing Justice* are promising first steps, including the contributions to an ecumenical understanding of revelation by Efraín Agosto (2009) and Jean-Pierre Ruiz (2009). The frequent and friendly scholarly collaboration of Latino/a biblical scholars and theologians from a broad range of Christian denominations was born both of necessity and of strategic sensibility in the face of the shared experiences of marginalization/minoritization. Yet it did not happen without deliberate and careful planning and forethought. As we continue to build on this solid foundation, then, connectedness as a characteristic and as a value of our scholarship practiced *latinamente* would also call for more intentional inter-religious dialogue – including, but not limited to, Christian–Jewish and Christian–Muslim engagement with respect to the understanding and interpretation of scripture. Thus far only very small steps have been taken in that direction (see Ruiz and Nanko-Fernández 2013; Ruiz 2003; Hidalgo 2013), and in an increasingly diverse religious landscape the opportunities are at least as significant as the challenges that such initiatives will involve.

Notes

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- 1 Quotations from the Bible are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

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CHAPTER 7

The Latino/a Theology of God as the Future of Theodicy

A Proposal from the Dangerous Memory of the Latino/a Jesus

Sixto J. García

The Theology of God in the Latino/a Theological Tradition: A History

The early efforts of Latino/a theology were aimed at establishing the legitimacy of the newborn: vis-à-vis questioning and not a little derision from some mainstream scholars and institutions, who dismissed the rubric of “Latino/a” theology either as a ghastly piece of theological impertinence or as an attempt to sublimate atavistic superstitions from “inferior cultures,” Latino/a theologians engaged in direct conversation and not a little confrontation with their learned despisers (with my apologies to Schleiermacher).

On the one hand, Latino/a theologians had to do the apologetics of Latino/a Christian theology as *Christian*, that is, not as a sudden and unwelcome intrusion of foreign mythology in the midst of the mainstream scholarly conversation. But, at the same time, they had to set about proving, arguing for, the specific *Latino/a* identity of their theologies. It was a theological balancing act that, in a sense, while far less intense and acerbic, continues to this day.

Included within this challenge was the obvious reality of diversity within the Latino/a theological community. I refer not only to ethnic/cultural/origin diversity (Mexican, Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and so on) but to the diversity of theological traditions and schools. One may misinterpret this diversity simply as the distinction between “conservative” and “liberal” Latino/a theologians. Besides the obvious fact – obvious to any self-respecting scholar in the world of the academy – that “conservative” and “liberal” are terms that mean a lot and mean nothing, the real distinction is more complex: it has to do with the diverse ways in which Latino/a theologians have chosen to ply their craft.

The preceding remarks serve to indicate that questions of method and disciplinary apologetics, rather than specific theological content – Christ, the Church, the Trinity, eschatology, ecumenism – prevailed in the early stages of Latino/a theology. Yet these main and defining concerns of theology were there, as they necessarily had to be, because it is impossible to argue for the legitimacy of doing Latino/a theology without reference to how Latino/a theologians address these main topics.

For obvious reasons (as they surface in and define this chapter), christology, ecclesiology, and grace were pre-eminent among the themes addressed by Latino/a theologians. Virgil Elizondo and his Latino/a retrieval of the sense of *Abba* as Papito in a sense inspired my (and many others') defining notions of a Latino/a theology of God, and ultimately, a Latino/a theodicy, as I will argue. In his still moving musings developed in his *Galilean Journey* (Elizondo 1999), he sets forth the foundational categories for the Latino/a theologians' search for God-language among Latino/a communities; further, he opened a clear path for the discernment of God and its concomitant theologizing among Latino/a theologians.

Orlando Espín has addressed, from the beginning, the questions of Tradition, popular religiosity, culture, and the *sensus fidelium*. Espín emphasized the defining, central role of culture, yet he does not reduce popular religiosity, and its pregnancy with the deepest truth and interpretation of the Christian tradition, to cultural parameters or interactions. The issue of God appears clearly contoured in his *The Faith of the People* (Espín 1997): the *sensus fidelium* finds expression in the indispensable symbols of popular religiosity that define Latino/a celebrations. Espín dialogues with Barth's (2010) suspicion, if not downright rejection, of mediation in the act and commitment of faith. Espín reflects a studious acquaintance with Barth's critical attitude to "religion" as an idolatrous attempt to somehow manipulate God, or worse, create new idols that replace Him/Her.

Espín introduces a christological dimension in his Latino/a theology of God: Jesus Christ is the analogy and symbol of God. Espín does not embrace, however, Roger Haight's (2000) reductionist notion of Jesus as symbol; rather, it is in Jesus that we can see the splendor and, one might say, the co-suffering of God. The popular books of prayer, born often of popular religious devotions, reflect and validate this Christocentric approach. Ultimately, for Espín, as for me, popular religiosity seems to be the privileged hermeneutic of God. This, it seems, would be another way of formulating Karl Rahner's notion of Jesus as symbol: the exegesis of John 14:9 ("Whoever has seen me, has seen the Father") would seem to be, in my opinion, the best way to approach Orlando Espín's theology of God.

This Christocentrism is also evident in Roberto Goizueta's work. The pilgrimage with Jesus, as epiphanized in the popular passion plays at San Fernando Cathedral, in San Antonio, Texas, are the full manifestation and presence, through the aesthetics of popular religious forms (see my metaphor of the "cathedral effect" in what follows), of a God who walks with his community. Goizueta's sense of Christocentric aesthetics finds further expression in his *Christ our Companion* (2009), where theological aesthetics assume a theological function that I dare call a propaedeutic to theodicy.

Allan Figueroa Deck has made an indispensable contribution to a Latino/a theology of God in his judiciously and insightfully selected anthology of essays, *Frontiers of Hispanic Theology in the United States* (1992). Espin's chapter on tradition and popular religion summarizes much of what we have already explored in his writings. Goizueta's chapter on Latino/a theology is a fundamental-theological assessment of the landscape of Latino/a theology at the time. Elizondo's chapter on *mestizaje* profiles at a deeper level the *locus* of the Latino/a encounter with God, and Maria Pilar Aquino sets forth pioneering forms and systems for the feminist dimension of Latino/a theology. My contribution to Latino/a Trinitarian theologies sought to somehow bring about an organic synthesis of christology, popular passion plays, and the roles of Mary and the Spirit. In a sense, I tried to offer foundational perspectives for further Latino/a Trinitarian explorations, which have not been plethora in forthcoming. I tried to emphasize the unveiling role of the true humanity of Jesus toward the Trinitarian reality of God. The anti-monophysite quality implicitly and connaturally, in fact, pre-theologically present in Latino/a popular religiosity is crucial to Latino/a Trinitarian understanding. The revelation of the Holy Spirit unveils a God with a suffering, anguished, human face where the Latino/a, acting as the poet and prophet of his or her community, can find the points of reference for a Trinitarian theology (which, in this chapter, I choose to express as Trinitarian theodicy).

Arturo Bañuelas' *Mestizo Christianity* (1995) brings together in compelling fashion a number of essays on the fundamental-theological features of Latino/a theology. Goizueta's reflection on praxis singularizes the theological value of actualized commitment for the Latino/a communities. His remarks on the rationality of praxis recall instinctively Maurice Blondel's *L'Action*. Praxis, Goizueta argues, is a form of reason (thereby empowering the theological quality of popular religious forms). My contribution on the places and sources of Latino/a theology sought to identify not only the classical sources of theology, but the Latino/a theologians' specific retrieval of them. Popular religiosity assumes pride of place, as the source of intuition of the sacred, and the *locus* for Latino/a theological validations. It was in attempting to make organic sense of the criss-crossing (and often contradictory) thoughts, principles, and insights that I entertained while preparing that chapter that the idea of Latino/a theology as theodicy began to assume, very slowly, a very real shape.

Contextualizing Remarks

Johann Baptist Metz (2006, 2007) has suggested that theology, from Auschwitz onwards, can only be *theodicy*, and more specifically, theodicy from the cry of the innocent victims (the expression "dangerous memory of Jesus" is his own coinage). Metz' suggestion has been echoed, before and since, by Jürgen Moltmann (1993) and others. Latino/a theology has been traditionally engaged in the issue of the suffering victims, but here we must, at the very outset of this chapter, ask: how

truly engaged have Latino/a theologians been with the question of God from the underside of the Latino/a story, which basically can be equivalently expressed as the underside of the starving poor, the homeless, the discriminated, and more radically, in Pope Francis' own words (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 55), "the excluded"?

Put more bluntly, how aware have we, Latino/a theologians, been that for us, for our communities, and for own method of *teología de conjunto* (for lack of a better translation, I would like to render it in English as communal theology), our present and future theology can only be defined as *theodicy*? For, as attractive and necessary it may be for us (and rightly so) to write and research on christology, Trinity, Grace, the Church, theological anthropology, and other classical themes proper to the theological endeavor, all of these must be read, researched, and written now, and for a long time to come, in the key of *theodicy*, the coherence and the connaturality of a loving, tender, compassionate, incarnate, crucified, and risen God in the midst of racism, exclusion, misunderstanding, sheer hatred, and attempts at exclusion. (See Espín 1997; cf. Goizueta 1995; Deck 1992; Metz 2006.)

The objection might be raised that these are not issues that come under the exclusive purview of Latino/a theologians, and surely there is a measure of truth in this. But our intent here is not to prove or argue that suffering of the kind alluded to is proprietarily ours, but rather to reflect, meditate, theologize, and yes, even contemplate, on how these issues require Latino/a theology to rethink and redefine itself as *theodicy*. This may not be exclusively ours, either, but *it is ours*, and as such we are called to address it.

In these brief remarks, I will argue that, at this particular crossroads of its history, Latino/a theology is called to hold forth the reality (existence?) and historical presence of the God proclaimed by the Christian Church, the God whose paschal self-lavishing into human history and existence, before the effective praxis of an atheistic culture which proclaims, in word and deed, that the God the Christian Scriptures and the Christian Church witnesses to is a contradiction in terms: a God whose very Trinitarian existence is but the expression of an eternal, paschal communion of suffering and redemption with the poor, the outcast, the excluded, the marginalized by society, that God is belied by the hatred, racism, arrogance, hedonism, and death of our cultural expressions.

US Latino/a communities find themselves at a truly critical moment in their history: the immigration issue, on the one hand, and the general renaissance of racism at all levels, on the other, have unleashed a tsunami of hatred and opposition against Latino/a communities in the USA of truly unprecedented proportions. It is far more alarming and dangerous than the Nativist violence of the mid-nineteenth century, which burned convents and churches, and placed signs at storefronts which read "No Irish [and later, Italian] need apply." Back then, the deeper forms and foundations of the US democratic systems were still undergoing excruciating labor pains that translated into a Civil War which took the lives of over

620,000 people; the Gettysburg Address and Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address were, in effect, redefinitions of the ethics of the republic, and quite theological in their own right.

But Latino/a communities live in a postmodern, post-democratic, and in a sense, as Karl Rahner (1977: 15) has reminded us, a post-Christian world. Our post-everything historical moment demands that Latino/a theologians address, embrace, reflect upon, and craft a new theological synthesis that says: yes, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of Jesus Christ, the God who has shown His/Her triune communion of persons as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, not only is not contradicted by and exiled from the human mind and conversation with reality, but He/She is the only personal being who can make sense of, and eventually, in the midst of the horrors and disasters of human history, be the wellspring of meaning and salvation. In short, Latino/a theology can but heed Metz' (2006: 18–20) advice, implicit already in Latino/a theological literature, and engage in *theodicy*.

*Searching for the sources of the language of God in Latino/a theology/theodicy:
Our loci theologici*

Our Latino/a experience from the underside of native and adopted history Each and every one of us either comes from a Latino/a country, or was born of Latino/a ancestors. We belong to two crossing, intertwining, and interweaving traditions. If we accept, as surely we all do, that history is not, as Spanish popular wisdom mockingly put it, *una sucesión de sucesos sucedidos sucesivamente* ("a succession of events successively succeeding one another") (Heidegger 1979), but rather the privileged hermeneutical context for our being-there (*Dasein*), then the sources of our Latino/a theology will be found deeply embedded within the cry and clamor of our own Latino/a experiences, and more specifically, our paschal experiences, our anguishes, aspirations, searches, and ambiguities.

History and salvation History is the privileged hermeneutic lens for Latino/a theology. More specifically, salvation history is the stage upon which the play of Latino/a culture and communities unfold their pursuit of meaning and self-coherence. The Latino/a theologian looks at the classical places and sources for theology: the Scriptures, the living Tradition of the Church, and the faith of the Church as taught by the official magisterium, which is, after all, nothing but the public expression of the *sensus fidelium*. But these sources and places do not offer themselves in hermeneutic isolation to the Latino/a theologian. Insofar as he or she seeks to make sense of, and to argue for the coherence of, God in his or her world, and in the world and the cosmos at large, he or she must needs take as the starting point the privileged hermeneutic experience of Latino/a religious culture: popular religiosity.

Popular religiosity: The cathedral of Latino/a theodicy

The cathedral effect: Pilgrimage, symbol, and theodicy in popular religiosity Many years ago I came upon a story told by Fulton Sheen concerning his years as a doctoral student in Louvain. During a summer vacation, he decided to travel to France, to visit the Gothic cathedrals. He had read about their majestic spires tickling the umbilicus of heaven, and the beauty of their stained glass windows. He arrived in Chartres, and he made his way across the main square toward the cathedral. He stopped a short distance from the front entrance, to admire the stained glass windows, and felt a deep disappointment: the beauty and color he had read about were not to be seen; instead, all he could gaze at were opaque, dark-grey, indiscernible shapes, vaguely suggesting human figures, but not much more. Then he decided to go inside the cathedral, and there, he turned to see the stained glass windows against the sunlight streaming from outside. He saw the color, the design, the purpose, the meaning, and the love lavished by the anonymous artisans burst into view, blossom into great landscapes of biblical stories and human events. The lesson learned was obvious: only from inside the cathedral was he granted access to beauty and meaning.

Popular religiosity Popular religiosity is, in a sense, the Gothic cathedral which, when perambulated inside with a healthy sense of Pauline boldness, without fear or apprehension, discloses the deeper forms and foundations of Latino/a theology. Popular religiosity has not always met the universal approval of the Catholic community, not even within the Latino/a people. Some Liberation theologians have, at some point in time, labeled it as alienating. Orlando Espín has argued that popular religion was long held as an embarrassment for US Latino/a religion and culture. The celebrations and liturgies of people immersed in color, ritual, history, and above all symbols of transcendence, supplication, anguish, and redemption were dismissed as residues of primitive, superstitious minds who had nothing to suggest or say concerning meaning and fulfillment.

This situation has changed, and contemporary official documents from within the Catholic tradition have witnessed to it. The Document of Aparecida (the final document of the V General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean) puts forth some rather theologically provocative thoughts:

This way of expressing the faith is present in different manners in all social sectors, in a multitude that merits our respect and affection, because their piety “manifests a thirst for God which only the simple and poor can know.” “... It is a people’s Catholicism,” deeply inculturated. (Aparecida, 258)

Here we can rejoice in finding an argument to marshal in support of our contention that Latino/a theology, today, cannot but be *theodicy*: there are two points that form the crucible of the presence of God in a world defined by “those who count for nothing” (1 Corinthians 1:28), by the *nada*, by that realm where the analogy of being loses itself

in the wonders of mystery. First, there is the *thirst for God*, that which defines woman and man, that which (as I am fond of telling my students) distinguishes us from the African elephant and the Swedish tarantula, that is, the definition of my being human as a hunger, desire, thirst, and craving for the Absolute, the concrete Absolute in history (Schelling), the Trinitarian God with a human face, met in Jesus Christ. This desire, hunger and craving are common to the atheist and the mystic, the saint and sinner. We have no control over them (Thomas Aquinas offers ample texts in this regard: ST I q. 94 a. 1; q. 19 a. 10; q. 82 a. 1; *Summa Contra Gentiles* 4. 92). Second, *only the simple and poor can know*. The *elachiston* of Matthew 25:40, the least of the least, are the *locus* of impossibility, where human meticulousness founders, and therefore, a place for *theodicy*.

Reading further, Aparecida tells us that:

We highlight pilgrimages, where the People of God can be recognized in their Journey. There the believer celebrates the joy of feeling surrounded by myriad brothers and sisters, journeying together toward God who awaits them. Christ himself becomes pilgrim, and walks arisen among the poor. The decision to set out toward the shrine is already a confession of faith, walking is a true song of hope, and arrival is the encounter of love. The pilgrim's gaze rests on an image that symbolizes God's affection and closeness. Love pauses, contemplates mystery, and enjoys it in silence. (Aparecida, 259)

Faith, hope, and love define the pilgrimage, the journey, the decision to set out toward the unknown and the painful. Key to the preceding text is: "*The pilgrim's gaze rests on an image that symbolizes God's affection and closeness. Love pauses, contemplates mystery, and enjoys it in silence.*" What is mystery? Here is a key category and space for Latino/a theodicy, for the Latino/a theologian's pursuit of the face of God: mystery is best imaged, as I again am wont to do with my students, with the experience of placing a powerful flashlight an inch from my eyes. When I switch it on, my eyes go blind, not because of a lack of light, but rather because of an excess of it. Mystery is the excess of light and love, and only in the pilgrimage do we walk with God's own human mystery, Jesus Christ. Roberto Goizueta (1995) has worked extensively on the intimacy between the San Fernando popular religious expressions and the experience of pilgrimage. It is an event of encounter with mystery, it is an event of *theodicy*. God is vindicated in the *nothingness* of the poor pilgrim.

But it is ultimately in the paschal event of Jesus Christ that popular religiosity offers an invitation to enter the cathedral and make sense of what are otherwise opaque and meaningless windows, landscapes of the history of the poor, the crossroads of our theology of God in a world where grace and evil wage ceaseless war; in other words, the paschal event where theodicy ultimately happens, as we will argue later. Here, in the black hole of the cross, the analogy of being is ultimately lost, and we are left only with God:

Our peoples particularly identify with the suffering Christ; they look at him, kiss him or touch his wounded feet as though saying: This is he “who has loved me and given himself up for me” (Gal 2:20). Many of them, beaten, ignored, dispossessed, hold their arms aloft. With their characteristic religiosity, they firmly adhere to the immense love that God has for them and that continually reminds them of their own dignity. (Aparecida, 265)

The *beaten, ignored, and dispossessed* are the privileged symbol within the tapestry of symbols that define popular religiosity. This is no small matter. Following Karl Rahner (1982) in this regard, I propose that symbol is that reality that makes present, is pregnant with, and communicates what it symbolizes. *Symbol* is that reality which makes itself present with full ontological reality in the other, which, in a Christian key, suffuses the world of women and men with an unimaginable love. Within the cosmos and pilgrimage of Latino/a theology, it is the warrant that transforms, or, if you will, redefines such theology as theodicy. The argument for God can only be made through the language of symbols, and here, as we will argue later, poetry and prophecy are privileged spaces of Latino/a symbols.

Scripture and Tradition: The places for God within the community of believers We may confidently take our point of departure on this topic from the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, of the Second Vatican Council. We allude specifically to DV 7–10. The key text of *Dei Verbum* says:

Sacred Tradition and sacred Scriptures, then, are bound closely together, and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing out from the same divine well-spring, come together in some fashion to form one thing, and move towards the same goal. (*Dei Verbum*, 9)

The Council’s key contribution to the age-long debate on the relationship between Tradition and Scriptures is precisely this deliberately vague “come together *in some fashion* to form one thing” (*Dei Verbum*, 9). The document does not specify *how* they come together: this is a matter for theologians and exegetes to debate. *Dei Verbum* also puts to rest the notion that Scripture and Tradition are *sources* of Revelation: there is only one source, the self-bestowing and lavishing God. Scripture and Tradition are its privileged channels.

Perhaps the most important contribution of *Dei Verbum* was to put to rest the *partim ... partim* misinterpretation of the Council of Trent’s *Decree on the Written Books and the Non-written traditions* of April of 1546 (Denzinger-Hünnerman 2012: 1501–8). This misreading argued that there are doctrines in the oral Tradition not contained in the Scriptures. This became an oppressive instrument for the magisterium to draw all sort of normative precepts for the People of God not warranted by the witnesses of Revelation. The Scriptures, the *norma non normata* of Revelation, was given a secondary role, that of being an acolyte to the Tradition. Precisely by calling theologians and exegetes to debate and discuss how both Tradition and Scripture come together, a dangerous approach for

many, the Council opened the door (albeit ever so slightly) for local theologies to engage in their own theology and exegesis. Hence the legitimacy of the Latino/a engagement with the open-ended mysteries and dangers of God's paschal self-surrender.

This consideration (perhaps much too long, and some will say, unnecessary for the purposes of this chapter) can lead us to consider the challenges of reading Scripture and Tradition as Latino/a theology, that is, as *theodicy*, as paschal, dangerous witnesses of the presence of a God whose loving affection and paternal/maternal tenderness is also our judgment.

Scriptures and Latino/a theodicy Three considerations are necessary here: first, the Scriptures are the Word of God. It would be a self-defeating waste of time to engage in a debate on this fundamental reality. Obviously there are several ways of interpreting the sense of *Word of God*, but it will suffice for our purposes to go along, with more or less critical intent, with the notion that the Holy Spirit, in some fashion, inspires an author or community (Rahner 1961), fully allowing for their human abilities and deficiencies.

In a chapter published in Bañuelas (1995), I argued that, while on the one hand, the Latino/a Scriptural interpreter is beholden, in some fashion, to the mainstream historico-critical methods, the demands for a post-critical, diachronic interpretation of the text, on the other hand, reflect the suspicion of historico-critical methods as venues for meaning and life. It is not unimportant that some forms of applying form criticism or redaction criticism result in an evisceration of the power of the text. This is particularly true of the reading of Gospel's texts. Metz' (2006) caveat about not diluting the dangerous memory of Jesus is quite decisive in this regard. The word of Jesus, as Metz and Karl Barth (2010: 3–27), in different fashions, state, can easily be, has been, and continues to be, emasculated of its threatening and convulsive meaning. Here the Latino/a theologian need not feel a tug to choose between an "Alexandrian" *logos/sarx* approach, or an "Antiochene" *logos/anthropos* perspective.

Here we can bring our second point: the Word of God, as witnessed by both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, always creates, re-creates, changes, renews, is life-giving: Genesis 1:1ff; Isaiah 55:10–11. And this attaches to a third point: the Word of God realizes the presence of the living God in history, it is theodicy in itself, it brings about the justification and the warrant for a God who approaches, encounters, and summons women and men: Luke 1:37; Mark 1:16–20, and so on.

This is the key understanding of the Word of God for the Latino/a theologian: it is theodicy in itself, because it is a Word that creates and summons, that challenges and penetrates, that is tender and dangerous. As I wrote back then, the echoes of Martin Heidegger's principle in his *Über den Humanismus*, "Die Sprache ist das Haus des Seins und die Behäusung des Menschenwesens" ("Language is the house of being, and the residence of humanity"), still find a hearing in this context. Further, Heidegger explored the meaning of *logos* as a vital, dynamic impetus encountering others in history, begging them to listen and to act accordingly, something akin to this from Goethe's *Faust*: "In der Anfang was der Tat" ("In the beginning there was the act"; Goethe 1998: I,

“Studienzimmer”). The Word of God acts as a warrant for the Latino/a theologian who wishes to do theological justice to the Latino/a experience: it is, again, an expression of theodicy.

Liturgy and Tradition I do not intend to discuss Espín’s well-crafted deliberations on Tradition, popular religiosity, it and the *sensus fidelium*. I just wish to highlight two things.

First, the correlation between liturgical formulae and the notion of tradition in the New Testament is well known. Suffice here to invoke Paul’s prophetic warning against the rich who gather in their opulent Corinthian homes to celebrate the Supper of the Lord, bringing their meals and wine along, but refusing to share with the poor: they will eat their own condemnation (1 Corinthians 11:27). The sense of Tradition is deeply embedded in the text. The quasi-orgiastic gathering that the wealthy Corinthians have deformed their liturgy into is harshly and threateningly denounced by Paul, who proceeds to tell them, in the first account ever of the words of Jesus over the bread and wine in the New Testament, how things really happened. The formula defines the sense of *kerygma* (both here and in 1 Corinthians 15:3–4): Paul makes a formulistic use of *paredoka*, the aorist of *paradidomi* “to hand down, to trade,” and of *parelabon*, the aorist of *paralambano* “to receive,” that conveys his main intention: the celebration of the Supper of the Lord, as a gathering where the poor are welcome, is a proclamation that will be uttered until the end of ages (1 Corinthians 11:26): *Hosakis gar ean esthíete ton arton touton kai to poterion pínete, to thánaton tou kyrios katangélete archi hou elthe* (“For, as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes”).

Second, it is a tragically attested experience in our parishes and faith communities, particularly in those where evangelical poverty is absent, and opulent rectories and halls seem to be the dominant features, that the proclamation of the Word is often castrated by homilists who, fearing that their wealthier faithful will recoil and withdraw their support, try to zigzag around the minefield of the dangerous words of the Gospel. I have discussed this elsewhere, but it deserves a notation nevertheless. It is counter-theodicy: the God of Jesus Christ is expelled, marginalized, and cast outside, along with those whose ill-clad, unclean conditions label them as unfit to worship with the mainstream members of the community.

The poor as a theological locus for Latino/a theodicy “The poor are the Gospel.” These words of Pope Francis, addressing the representatives of the Latin American Conference of Religious (CLAR), June 10, 2013, seem to define not only the pastoral and spiritual dimension of his pontificate, but the theological core as well. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, he argues that:

For the Church, the option for the poor is primarily a theological category rather than a cultural, sociological, political or philosophical one. God shows the poor “his first mercy.” This divine preference has consequences for the faith life of all Christians ... Inspired by

this, the Church has made an option for the poor which is understood as a “special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity ...” This is why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them. The new evangelization is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the center of the Church’s pilgrim way. ... (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 198)

The preferential option for the poor has been a constant and central theme of Latino/a theology since the very dawn of its emergence. It has also been a consistent principle of Liberation Theology and all the theological strivings born within the bowels of the outcast, the despised, and the excluded. What is so particular about the option for the poor in Latino/a theology in the US? I dare argue that it is precisely the unavoidable option of engaging in theology as theodicy that places the option for the poor under a unique and very special scrutiny in Latino/a theology.

The poor are a *locus* of Latino/a theology not as one option among many, but as the prerequisite foundation of its dynamics. It is precisely in opting to engage in a theology that “has no future,” as a former colleague of mine once warned me, it is precisely in doing theology from within the bowels of those who “are nothing” (1 Corinthians 1:28), that we can understand theology as the “rational and intelligent discourse about God,” as a reflection on the mystery of God. For God, as we will proceed to reflect in the next section, has chosen to reveal Himself/Herself only and exclusively in the Cross of Jesus Christ. We begin the main section of this chapter, therefore, bearing in our souls and minds Wolfhart Pannenberg’s dictum: “Who and what God is, is revealed in the Paschal event of Christ” (Pannenberg 1968: 130).

The Paschal, Dangerous Memory of the Suffering Trinity as Theodicy: The Latino/a Theology of God

The ad intra Passion of God

The suffering God of the Tradition Deep within the heart of the Latino/a religious life and praxis, there lies a suffering God, begging to be discerned and seized upon by Latino/a theologians. This is not just the God who suffers in the historical journey and Passion of Jesus. This is the God who suffers *qua God, God as God*, entering fully into the realm of human brokenness and anguish.

The ancient debate as to whether God is *pathetos*, capable of suffering, subject to suffering, or supremely transcendent of human suffering, and all human emotions, dwelling in that blinding light of glory above the heavens where He/She is safely sheltered from human capriciousness and passions, has been waged since the beginning of Christian theology, and will be, most assuredly, waged for untold years to come.

We choose, as the most faithful reflection of the Great Tradition, and of Latino/a theology and theodicy, the path already begun by the earliest authors of the Greek Christian tradition. Origen of Alexandria had already argued that “he first suffered for us, and then became incarnate” (*De Principiis*, 1.2.5). Love in its most accomplished sense reveals and unveils the Trinitarian mystery, “Imo vero vides Trinitatem, si charitatem vides” (Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VIII.8.12).

The question about God in Latino/a theology/theodicy, however, follows the same historical and thematic path that it did in the New Testament and later apostolic Church: it begins with Jesus Christ’s paschal event, defines the filial relationship between Jesus and the God *Abba* he addresses in a uniquely scandalous way, and then flows into Trinitarian considerations, where the dense witness of texts on the Holy Spirit (particularly in the Gospel of Luke, and in the shorthand but immensely rich pneumatology of the Johannine Gospel) opens the key to the triadic reality of God (Jeremias 1983: 38–67; Kasper 2003: 153–7, 2013: 156–75; García 1992).

At the heart of Latino/a theology/theodicy of God: The paschal Jesus as the unveiling of the suffering Trinity

Thomas Aquinas on the Passion of Jesus The unique and unrepeatable consequences of the sufferings of Jesus have been well affirmed in the Tradition. We may begin with Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III q. 46 a. 6. The question that he poses as the subject of reflection, *utrum ... dolor passionis Christi fuerit maior omnibus aliis doloribus*, receives his emphatic “Yes.” Precisely because Jesus is the Son of God, he assumes human limitations in their fullness, both bodily (*dictum est cum de defectibus assumptis a Christo ageretur; in Christo patiente fuit verus dolor et sensibilis, qui causatur ex corporali nocivo*) and interiorly (*et dolor interior, qui causatur ex apprehensione alicuius nocivi, qui tristitia dicitur*). Thomas’ text defines with unmitigated power the true pain (*verus dolor*) of Jesus, against any implicit monophysite (or docetic) interpretation of the Passion. And then he adds that Jesus experienced *dolor interior*, caused by apprehensions (Mark 14:33–6): the agony of a Jesus who sees his world crumble, feels surrounded by abandonment and betrayal, and knows not what to do, except clamor out to his Father: sadness, infinite sadness: *qui tristitia dicitur*.

Further on, Thomas discusses, in q. 54 a. 4, a seemingly banal item: he ponders *utrum ... corpus Christi cum cicatricibus resurgere ... debuerit*: Indeed, one might argue, what is the contextual value of pondering whether the risen body of Christ bore the wounds of the Passion, or not? Thomas considers the objections: first of all: risen bodies are incorruptible. But: *cicatrices et vulnera ad quandam corruptionem pertinent et defectum*: the scars and wounds reflect corruption and defect. Thomas addresses a second objection: the body of Christ rose in its full bodily integrity, *sed aperturæ vulnerum contrarianter integritat corporis*: the wounds contradict such bodily integrity.

Thomas answers the first objection: *quod cicatrices illae quae in corpore Christi permanent, non pertinent ad corruptionem vel defectum; sed ad maiorem cumulum gloriae, in quantum sunt quaedam virtutis insignia*: the wounds and scars borne by the risen Christ reflect a greater glory, they are in fact the banner of his power. To the second objection, Thomas

says: *quod illa aperture vulnerum, quamvis sit cum quadam solutione continuitatis, totum tamen hoc recompensatur per maiorem decorum gloriae: ut corpus non sit minus integrum, sed magis perfectum*: the wounds do not rupture the integrity of the risen body of Jesus, rather they constitute a greater beauty of glory, a more perfect body.

A Latino/a theodicy retrieval of Thomas' arguments: Again, the cathedral effect I once wrote about my first (almost traumatic) experience of a passion play, the most dramatic form of popular religious outpouring:

I remember watching, as a child, the passion play staged by the small and very old parish church, about three blocks from my maternal grandparents' home. As the bleeding wooden images paraded before the iron gate of my grandfather's front yard, followed by the parish men (chosen from among the tallest and strongest) dressed in imposing Roman legionnaire's garb, wielding what seemed to me as infinitely long and threatening spears, I experienced the slow but certain growth of the "sacred" all about me. I became totally immersed in the Pasch of the Lord being played out before my eyes. For a few minutes I lived within sacred space and sacred time, and experienced God's penetration of time in the person of the suffering Son. (García 1992: 94)

Going back again, years after writing the preceding, I do recall that the first feeling I knew was dread: watching the bloody wooden images and their Roman tortures strutting before me was overwhelming. But dread quickly gave way to awe, that most fundamental and indispensable of all human feelings; in fact, if we are to believe Plato, the starting point for philosophy (*Theatetus* 155 D), and most assuredly, for a Latino/a theology that seeks to define itself, as it cannot otherwise do, as theodicy: the feeling of awe and wonder.

Thomas' questions on the suffering Jesus Christ spread their luminous splendor before the Latino/a theologian as an invitation to gaze, in bewildering and blinding light, upon the mystery of the Passion: first, we are told that the sufferings of Jesus, the Son of God, were the most painful ever suffered by any human being. As theodicy, this contradicts the implicit monophysitism of our mainstream culture parishes, and in my experience, particularly in the wealthier parishes: Jesus is divine, and his humanity somehow is subordinated, ontologically, to his divinity – or sometimes simply fades from view, in which case we have a further lapse back into docetism. The brutal, patent, prophetic, risky, vulnerable call to a communion with the Crucified Jesus implies the plunge into the unknown of a suffering humanity.

We can take this several steps forward, always in the key of Latino/a theology and theodicy: the sufferings of Jesus are identical with his mission, with his person. Further, if we look at the Trinity *ad intra*, the paschal event of Jesus defines the eternal procession of the Son from the Father. When God beholds, with His/Her eternal gaze, the Son before Him/Her, He/She never sees the *filius incarnandus*, the Son waiting to be incarnate, the pre-incarnate, disembodied Son. The only Son the Father beholds before Him is, from a beginning without a beginning, the Incarnate, Crucified, and Risen Christ. There are a number of New Testament texts that can be validly invoked, without fear of collapsing into

eisgesis: John 1:3; 1 Corinthians 5:5–6; Colossians 1:15–20. But, for the time being, we can allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by awe and wonder: how can the scars and wounds of Jesus define, as a designer's tapestry, his risen body, the ultimate victory over death?

Latino/a communities which define their faith around the *theodrama* of popular religiosity are surely fit to answer this: the wounds of Jesus, the ultimate and most radical presence of oppression, death, poverty, exclusion, and marginalization, are an integral part of the body and world of resurrection. They are not an exception, but a definition of the drama of salvation. The Latino/a theologian now is able to perceive that deep within the bowels of the Godhead there is *passio*, there is feeling, there is a suffering that found historical *pleroma* in the human face of God, in Jesus Christ.

This is why, and there is no other coherent reason, his wounds and scars, in which the oppressed, poor, marginalized Latino/a communities live, in which they participate fully, are the foundations of Latino/a theodicy. This is theodicy, simply because it says, ringing with the clamor (*Der Schrei*) of the Psalms (Metz 2006: 108), we can argue that the suffering of oppression, hunger, and death, and particularly, in its most excruciating and bewildering form, the suffering of the innocent, is deeply embedded within the DNA of Jesus' Resurrection. The suffering of children swept away by tsunamis in Indonesia and Japan, crushed under fallen buildings in Haiti, and victimized by senseless genocidal wars in Egypt, Sudan, and other places will remain an abiding challenge to the theologian, and in particular, yes, in a unique fashion, to the theologian of suffering Latino/a communities; but we have a window on the theology of the incomprehensible tragedies and the multifaceted evil that surrounds us: evil is borne in and by the wounds and scars of Christ, but they are now an integral part of life, of resurrection (Hart 2005: 1–35).

Walter Kasper's theodicy: A co-suffering God

Kasper (2003) offers that if God, *qua* God, suffers, then the evil of suffering (and one might add, the suffering of the innocent) is no longer an argument against the reality of God. But, can God as God suffer? Kasper holds that the ancient notion of God as *apatheos*, as dwelling in a sphere beyond passion and com-passion for human beings, has been misinterpreted. The original intent of the Greek Christian theologians was, as we have previously argued, to protect the radical transcendence of God, beyond the reach of human manipulation.

Kasper (quoting from Lactantius, *De ira Dei*, 13) ultimately seeks to provide a compelling response to the ancient objection against the reality of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God held forth by Epicurus (340–270BCE): either God wills, but cannot prevent evil, in which case God is not truly God; or God has the power, but does not will to prevent evil, in which case God is the devil himself; or God neither has the power nor has the will to prevent evil, in which case we are back to the starting point: God does not exist. In recent times, Albert Camus (1952: 42) has recast Epicurus' argument in the key of human freedom and the freedom of God.

Kasper's arguments stands on two propositions: first, paraphrasing Anselm of Canterbury's ontological argument (*Proslogion*, 1.1), he affirms that the Cross of Christ is that "greater than which none can be thought" (Kasper 2003: 196). Not even God can conceive anything greater than the Cross of his Son, because the Cross is the ultimate expression of divine love: "The Cross is the utmost that is possible to God in his self-surrendering love" (Kasper 2003: 194).

The Cross is the most radical paradox: in the most radical suffering, there the most radical love is revealed:

Because the Cross is the *locus* where God reveals his infinite and radically omnipotent love, it does not constitute a "de-divinization" of God but the revelation of the divine God ... Only an almighty love can give itself wholly to the other and be a helpless love ... Here we have the key point: God's self-emptying, his weakness and his suffering are not the expression of a lack, as they are in finite beings; nor are they the expression of a fated necessity. If God suffers, then he suffers in a divine manner, that is, his suffering is an expression of his freedom; suffering does not befall God, rather he freely allows it to touch him. (Kasper 2003: 194-5)

This suffering is only analogical to ours:

He does not suffer, as creatures do, from a lack of being; he suffers out of love, and by reason of his love, which is the overflow of his being. To predicate becoming, suffering and movement in God does not, therefore, mean that he is turned into a developing God ... Because God is the omnipotence of Love, he can as it were indulge in the weakness of love; he can enter into suffering and death without perishing therein. (Kasper 2003: 195) ...

But this love can be dangerous and painful:

More than this, the lover allows the other to affect him; he becomes vulnerable precisely in his love. Thus love and suffering go together ... The self-emptying of the cross is therefore not a de-divinization, but his eschatological glorification. (Kasper 2003: 196)

There is a compelling and temptingly persuasive seduction in Kasper's argument. It would seem to address quite well the inevitable task of the Latino/a theologian: to commit himself or herself to a theodicy that can hold forth for the God of tenderness, compassion, and mercy, hanging from the many crosses of oppression he or she lives in the midst of, in the Latino/a communities. If indeed God suffers as an expression not of a defect or inadequacy in His/Her divine being, but rather as an exuberance of omnipotent love, rather as an overflow of an omnipotent powerlessness of love, then all rebellions, screams, and fist-raising to the heavens demanding a reason or a coherence for exploitation and exclusion would be rendered pointless, would seem nothing but sheer arrogance. But the argument leaves itself open to criticism, as we shall see next.

Johann Baptist Metz' theodicy: Suffering on account of (because of) God (Leiden an Gott)

Johann Baptist Metz, following a path not uncommon to Latino/a theology (García 1992), has taken issue with the attempt of some theologians, such as Kasper, who have in fact “included and overcome” (*Aufgehoben*) the problem of human suffering within God Himself/Herself, attempting somehow to make sense of evil and suffering by finding it within the bowels of God's Trinitarian comprehension. Metz states the issue very directly:

I have never believed that the discourse about the God who suffers, or about the suffering in God, represents an adequate way to confront the theological scandal elicited by the question of theodicy. For me, the *pathos* of Christian hope is always inserted in the suffering on account, by reason, of God (*Leiden an Gott*). (Metz 2006: 18–19)

The recent attempts to make sense of human suffering within Trinitarian contexts fail to do justice, to respect human suffering, as well as God's omnipotence, the denial of which would unravel any attempt at crafting a meaningful theodicy:

Does there not exist precisely, for Christian theology, the negative mystery of human suffering that will not allow itself to be harmonized by any other name? (Metz 2006: 19–20)

And, he further adds:

Thus, what prevents the discourse about a God that suffers from being only a sublime duplication of human suffering and impotence? ... And conversely, what guarantees that the discourse about the solidary God, who suffers with us, will not be reduced to a mere projection and duplication of human experiences, under the anonymous pressure of the ideal of solidarity, so pervasive in our society? ... Is there not a violation here of the classical doctrine of analogy (which speaks of a *maior dissimilitudo* between God and the world)? What prevents this discourse about the suffering in God or the suffering between God and God from bespeaking an externalization of suffering?

And then, more directly against Kasper:

In my judgement, the discourse about the God who suffers runs the risk of diminishing antecedently the theological of human suffering. If God suffers, then suffering – some will say – is no longer a true objection against God. But, does the inscrutable experience of suffering not represent a problem for the believer, perhaps *the* problem, the decisive question which, along the aeons, has accompanied the history of religions and faith? (Metz 2006: 20)

Metz' objections have a critical value for the Latino/a theologian. Theodicy cannot be dismissed or mitigated by reducing human suffering – and in particular, the suffering of the innocent, of children – to a dissolution within the perichoretic

interpenetration of the divine persons. Metz holds that Kasper's arguments – and other similar ones – run the risk of disrespecting human suffering by basically referring it to the higher Trinitarian milieu. Only in the longing and yearning, in curiosity and inquiry, and in clamoring (with the Psalms) can we find coherent responses to human suffering.

The Latino/a theologian walks indeed, and does theology, from within the bowels of the suffering, despair, anguish, anxiety, hunger, and exclusion of the Latino/a communities. This has been a central perspective of Latino/a theology from its beginnings. The story of Romano Guardini's query, which he planned on addressing to God upon seeing him, as quoted by Metz, surely raises echoes in the minds and hearts of Latino/a theologians: it is a passionate question which:

No book, not even Scripture, no dogma, no magisterium, no theodicy or theology, not even my own, can respond to the questioning: Why, my God, this dreadful detour towards salvation? Why the suffering of the innocent? Why guilt? (Metz 1998: 69)

This cry and clamor will continue to demand a response (notice I have been avoiding the word "answer," simply because there is none) to the clamor of the suffering. We will see shortly that Metz' appeal to the clamor, somehow dialoguing intimately with Kasper's notion of a divine conjugal love of powerlessness that defines the Trinitarian being of God, can be creatively appropriated by the Latino/a theologian. Now, we will briefly discuss a theme pregnant with possibilities for Latino/a theodicy, and for the understanding of, and intimacy with God, of the Latino/a communities.

*Hans Urs von Balthasar's theology of the intimacy between the paschal mystery and the Trinity:
A pointer for Latino/a theodicy*

Hans Urs von Balthasar centers his reflection upon his guiding theological criterion: only love is credible: "Love alone is credible because it is the only thing that is truly intelligible, the only thing that is truly 'rational.' Love is that than which nothing greater can be thought" (von Balthasar 2005). His theological intimacy between the paschal event of Jesus and the Trinity gravitates around four points: (1) Jesus' death is the turning point where divine love and divine justice coincide; (2) the Cross is an event of Trinitarian surrender; (3) Jesus' obedience is the key to his hypostatic identity; and (4) Jesus' mission is identical with his person (Hunt 1997: 64ff).

The affirmation that love alone is credible has an ontological value for von Balthasar. It cannot be reduced to moral apologetics, or spiritual inspiration. Only love, as epiphanized in the Cross of Christ, can offer persuasion and credibility, can move hearts and minds to committed assent and risky communion with the Crucified one. It does bear foundational importance for Latino/a theodicy: only a Latino/a theology that can be translated into risky, vulnerable, self-surrendering, crucified love can be credible, can sustain theodicy.

The inner-Trinitarian event is the key landscape of the loving face of the Trinity. The Father forsakes his identity into the person of the Son. (The seventeenth-century debate between the school of Giessen and the school of Tübingen concerning the extent of divine *kenosis* does not concern von Balthasar here.) The Father forsakes himself, his own identity, into the person of the Son, without losing himself in the Son. This self-destitution is infinite, and as such, establishes a separation that is also infinite (von Balthasar 1980: 300–3). This separation will find concrete historical form in the Cross, and more pertinently, in Jesus’ cry of abandonment, so crucial for von Balthasar’s Trinitarian theology (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). The cry of Jesus reflects not only a very real, very intestinal, feeling of Jesus: it is also a Trinitarian cry, that finds concrete definition in the suffering of the Cross (von Balthasar 1990: 40–4).

Von Balthasar’s theology of the paschal mystery of the Trinity is at heart a theodicy, because it says, however implicitly, that the most intimate union between any two beings in reality is the union between the Father and the Son, so intimate that, together with the Spirit which crafts this unity, they are one only God. But, precisely because of this, the most infinite distinction and distance between any two beings in reality is the distinction and distance between the Father and the Son, a distension sustained by the Spirit, and this paradox can only be answered in the key of love: love alone is credible, because love alone gives the beloved the confirmation and seal of his or her being, his or her most intimate goodness, and therefore, love presupposes a letting go: when I love someone, I bring about an intimate union that no third party can even begin to adumbrate. Yet, if that love is genuine and thereby forsakes manipulation, then I have to let go of the beloved, and the more intense the love, the more deeply intimate and the more deeply distant the Other will be. I will always be loving a Thou that is more intimate to me than myself, yet more the Other to me than anyone else.

The Latino/a theologian’s response to mainstream theodicies

Latino/a theologians can draw with awe and wonder from John Henry Newman’s creative notion of the *antecedent probabilities*, which he develops in his fifteen Oxford Sermons, of 1826–43 (Newman 1997: Sermons 10–13). Newman argues that it is not by dint of rigorous syllogisms that faith happens, but rather by a love that allows the mind to be illumined by *antecedent probabilities*, that is, by the convergence of intuitions and experiences that, at a given point, become the light of coherence and allow the assent of faith. In this regard, Newman introduces a distinction that calls, deep to deep, to Latino/a theology: that between *reasoning* and *arguing*.

The regular people, those untrained in philosophy and theology (Newman has in mind not only the “people in the pews,” but all believers), may argue the validity of their faith with flawed arguments, but they will “reason” their faith well, that is, they will sense the connatural knowledge that faith is coherent and consistent with human life, that the God they give their assent to is not only the object of an intellectual response, but the ultimate meaning of a love that defines the human person. One may argue that

Newman is retrieving, under a different guise, Thomas Aquinas' notion of the connaturality of soul toward God, toward grace: *Naturaliter anima est capax gratiae* ("the soul is naturally capable of grace"), argues Thomas (*Summa Theologiae*, I-II q. 113 a. 10). Echoes can be found, of course, of Pierre Rousselot's *The Eyes of Faith*, but regardless of the sources, Newman's proposal has fascinating possibilities for Latino/a theology/theodicy. We will ponder on these next.

At the Core of the Present Chapter: The Forms and Contours of the Latino/a Theologian's Retrieval of the Dangerous Memory of Jesus: The Heart of Latino/a Theodicy

The dangerous memory of Jesus

It is again Johann Baptist Metz who has defined his understanding of christological praxis as a risky openness to the "dangerous memory of Jesus" (Metz 2007: 130–2; cf. Metz 2006 17–27, 50–68). The notion of "dangerous memory" is open to diverse interpretations. The prophetic and martyrial imperative come to mind right away, but there is more to it. The Latino/a theologian's retrieval of the "dangerous memory of Jesus" as the grounds for theodicy is, fundamentally, a call for rigorous reflection (the task of the theologian), compelling witness (making the risky God of Jesus Christ present in the Latino/a communities), and spirituality (prayer and contemplation).

Gerhard Lohfink (2014: 1–19, 57–8) has reminded us of how dangerous, how threatening, the memory of Jesus can (and should) be. Jesus cannot be tamed. Any such attempt will result in an even more impressively prophetic and dangerous demand from Jesus. The Latino/a theologian canvasses the landscape of his or her community, at this particular point in time, and realizes that the scandalous warnings of Jesus concerning the forensic, legalistic sickness of his interlocutors are being played out today, with ever-increasing intensity.

The sufferings from racism, exclusion, marginalization, hunger, and poverty of the Latino/a communities in the US, the Latino/a theologian's privileged context for his or her theologizing, have found a new expression with the immigration issue. The vociferation against the eleven and a half million undocumented migrants in US territory has found expression in not just an anti-immigration onslaught, but an anti-Latino/a racism of unprecedented virulence. The dangerous memory of Jesus, speaking ever from a Gospel tradition that refuses, time and again, to be domesticated by the accommodating, dilettantish, and bland homilies of mainstream parishes, softening the consciences of the oppressors with the tranquilizers of a vertical Christianity that ignores the world of injustice all around them, in their own backyard, refuses to be silenced.

The Latino/a theologian then realizes that his or her theology can only be theodicy, since the belief in a God of justice and mercy in the Latino/a communities hinges on the community's awareness that in the midst of these tsunamis of racism, prejudice, and

exclusion, God stands not on the side of the oppressor and the racist, but on their side. Jesus continues to cry out from his Cross the cry of the Latino/a people subjected to ignominy and indignity. Only the dangerous memory of Jesus, lavishing assurances of tenderness and mercy on the oppressed Latino/as, reminds the oppressor who basks in the safety of a parish feudal enclave – where the ill-clad, the dirty, and the non-white are excluded, or accepted in the margins – that Jesus' love and tenderness is also his judgment.

The Latino/a theologian seeking to craft a theodicy for his or her people, that is, a theological articulation that will affirm and epiphanize the luminous splendor of God's love for his or her community, rather than a *tenebra*, a void of meaning, of coherence, ready to be filled by the voices of despair and abandonment, will call to mind Hans-Georg Gadamer's (1960: 437–8) notion of *Zugehörigkeit* ("belonging-ness"). The term signifies more than just a membership card in a community. It connotes the sense of being incarnated in a community of communion, in a *polis*, whether religious or political, where the members represent and embody, each and every one of them, and all of them as communion, the community itself.

The theodicies of Kasper, Metz, and von Balthasar we have examined represent, in broad strokes, the different paths followed by mainstream theologians, and to a good, real extent by Christians today, to make sense of the biblical God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of Jesus Christ, the God who, rather than a punishing God waiting for us to slip on the banana-peel of sin, is the Abba of the prodigal son, scanning the horizon for His/Her lost children, in the divinely untiring hope that their profile will emerge one day from the morning mists, and then run to hug them, kiss them, and celebrate a party as they return from the realm of the dead, as they are found from among the lost.

These theodicies present an ambiguous face to the Latino/a theologian. On the one hand, they seem at times remote from the concrete historical specificity of Latino/a communities. Kasper's and von Balthasar's theodicies seem to somehow absorb, or assimilate, divine and human suffering in an undifferentiated whole; they run the risk of projecting, as Metz claims, our human suffering into the dance of mutual Trinitarian penetration by the divine persons, and thereby disrespecting the concreteness, the agony, and the pain of the human sufferer. A suffering God, as Metz and his mentor Karl Rahner, and others, have said, does human suffering little good, offers no compelling answer, opens no horizons of hope, if all this suffering God does is suffer, thereby multiplying pain and agony. Worse, it threatens to unravel the faith of the People of God in a God whose power is his mercy, his tenderness, who can listen to our anguished pleas of prayer. A God that can do no better than co-suffer with the oppressed and discriminated Latino/a communities, who cannot come rushing to the help of a migrant mother whose 5-year-old child is dying of thirst crossing the desert from Nogales into the US, can easily be dismissed as another distressed companion on the journey. Here, the dangerous memory of Jesus is no longer a place for theodicy, but an unmitigated disaster.

On the other hand, these mainstream theodicies present possibilities for Latino/a theology and theodicy. First of all, they share in the common deposit of faith in the paschal mystery and event of Jesus of Nazareth, the human face of the paschal Father, revealed to us by the Spirit. This is the same Jesus whose dangerous memory has challenged the Christian community of faith since its beginnings. They remind Latino/a theologians that they, like us, believe that in Jesus of Nazareth, heaven embraced the earth, death was vanquished by life, and love banished hatred and arrogance. Second, Latino/a theology is meant to appropriate the foundational, prophetic claims of the Tradition and translate them into Latino/a forms, a mission which is not a mere pasting of traditional dogma, doctrine, and theology into Latino/a culture, but actually the creation of something *new*, of something that was not there before, a voice as yet unheard: the dangerous echoes of Jesus clamoring within the bowels of the Latino/a experience. This is new, radically and dangerously new.

Latino/a theologians, therefore, can redefine the dangerous memory of Jesus as the call to witness, proclaim, teach, and sing to their communities, with the peerless clamor (*Schrei*) of the Psalms and the Gospels, that God also walks our journey of suffering, not only in the crucified face of Jesus, but in the Father, *qua* God, as well. But God is not just another companion of our suffering journey, fairly impotent to do anything about our pain and distress. The God of the Latino/a dangerous memory of Jesus is the font, the wellspring of a love that can indeed reconcile, heal, and renew our wounded beings, who can, and will, open new horizons of promise and life. This is a God we can pray to from the depths of our suffering, precisely because He/She has embraced, has indeed *become* our human brokenness, and has shown the epiphany of His/Her omnipotence as the radical powerlessness of love.

The return to the cathedral

All of this may sound, at first blush, nonsensical, vacuous, empty of substance (or, to put it in the more irreverent words of a former colleague of mine, “mystical moonshine”). But it is nevertheless the deepest truth upon which the theodicy of Latino/a communities must stand. For, let there be no doubt, and let us reiterate it once again, the future of Latino/a theology is theodicy: God must and will be theo-logized, that is, made coherently and compellingly alive as the deepest reality of hope and tenderness, of love and life, of redemption and justice for the Latino/a communities. And, at the center of this theodicy, there will be forever the dangerous memory of Jesus, in a far more threatening, risky, vulnerable, and joyful aspect than that held forth by Metz, Kasper, and other mainstream theologians. It is, after all, something new that is dawning (2 Corinthians 5:17): the old has passed, the new has come.

Latino/a theodicy returns, therefore, time and again, not to propositional *Summae* (as useful and necessary as they may be, and are), not to divagations on the

self-sufficiency of sociology, or contrived wars waged against colonial biblical texts; it is not in the trenches of postcolonialism, however that may be understood, but in the far more radical demands of the clamor, the song, the symbols, and the joy of popular religiosity. For the Latino/a theologian, the metaphysics, sacramentality, and theodicy of popular religious celebration are the irreplaceable wellspring of dangerous theology.

But again, we must perambulate inside the cathedral, inside our communities, and celebrate and suffer with them. Just as Latino/a theodicy may critically appropriate the notion of a suffering God *qua* God, who nevertheless, precisely because He/She co-suffers, shows the powerlessness of His/Her power to rescue, renew, and redeem, just so Latino/a theologians must need walk inside the cathedral of Latino/a communities, and together gaze at the stained glass windows, plethoric of Jesus' healings, Mary, and the saints, but also of crucifixion and persecution.

Mary, at the crossroads of Latino/a theodicy

We can say, without any reticence or apprehension of giving offense, that the image of Mary as the *perfect disciple* is a privileged launching pad of ecumenical dialogue on Mary. And, indeed, in the fullness of time (Galileans 4:4), Mary said a "Yes" that all Christians are called to echo. She said "Yes," and human history and existence changed dramatically, as they began to experience their renewal and redemption.

Assuming we need not be concerned with inducing Mariolatric thoughts in anyone, we can say that in Mary's radical self-destitution, in her paradigmatic evisceration of herself, of all her plans, illusions, and dreams, to embrace with full risk and danger the will of God, we have, not an anti-feminist story of womanly submission to a patriarchal, paternalistic God, but the ultimate revelation of what it means to be human: to become a radical risk, a decisive and definitive self-bestowal of unspeakable fortitude and grace into the hands of God, to take a leap into the unknown that allows her to understand and share in communion the anguish, distress, oppression, and exclusion of the Latino/a communities.

Mary of Guadalupe, in particular, holds for me a special fascination, if for no other reason than that the deepest, most cogent theological anthropology and metaphysics available to the Latino/a theologian is given to us in the *Nican Mopohua*. There is a whole scholarly treatise waiting to be written on the profound metaphysics of healing, love, tenderness and risky self-surrender to Juan Diego in the story of the Fourth Apparition, Tuesday, December 12, 1531: to the insecure, shaken, fear-ridden son of the oppressed continent, she says: "Am I not here, who am your mother ... Are you not in the hollow of my mantle?" This is the most compelling theodicy that there is, simply because this is love issuing forth its credibility as transforming love, sheltering nearness, forgiving intimacy. This is how God makes Himself/Herself present in our lives, in our Latino/a communities. This is where we can touch the face of God, where we can see the divine countenance without dying (Exodus 33:18–20; cf. John 1:14), and only Mary, in a

privileged fashion, can show us, without deceit, anxiety, anguish, or dread, the face of her Crucified Son. Mary is theodicy, in its most poetically and theologically accomplished form.

Conclusion

It is the mission of the Latino/a theologian to converse with and be evangelized by his or her communities, to be enriched by the poor, to witness to the world that the migrant is not a burden but a gift, not a problem but a treasure, that the hue of our skin is not a threat to national securities but a pledge of deeper and more luminous encounter. The stained glass windows will always look opaque and meaningless from outside, prudishly concealing their beauty and love from those who seek to domesticate these from their own self-sufficient positions of power.

I cannot help but go back, time and again, to that somber Good Friday afternoon of my childhood, when I saw marching past me the bloody and anguished wooden images of the suffering Jesus, Mary, and the disciples, followed by the fierce-looking Roman soldiers, spears at the ready, on their way to the Cross. I cannot help but assume that theodicy best happens as the dangerous memory of the Crucified Jesus shines through the images and symbols of our passion plays, our popular religious clamor. I was awed by symbols, and, after all, as we have said, symbols are realities that are pregnant with, and convey, what they symbolize. Popular religious symbols make present and communicate the realm of the sacred, not as something obscure and foreboding, but as the realm of the Crucified Jesus, as the realm of song and clamor.

For that is pretty much what popular religious manifestations are: a clamor, a song, a celebration, in agony and joy, of the God of Jesus Christ, the God who redeems and embraces. And just as I felt first dread, and then awe and wonder, at the popular religious play happening before me, just so I cannot help but think that, assuming their fidelity to their mission, Latino/a theologians must allow themselves to be seized by the awe and wonder of the *theodrama* that happens in human history and existence, and with a particularly excruciating and joyful clamor in our Latino/a communities; and once they are seized by this awe and wonder, once they have allowed themselves to be evangelized by the dangerous memory of Jesus, they can accompany their communities telling them the stories of the stained glass windows. After all, the mysteries of popular religiosity are revealed only to the poor, and this pilgrimage of poverty with the poor, the walk of the dangerous memory of Jesus, is theodicy.

The secrets of the stained glass windows belong to those who embrace the challenge and the call to allow themselves to be wounded and stricken by the dangerous memory of Jesus. Ever present within the spaces of our hearts and consciousness, it constantly beckons the Latino/a theologian to engage in theodicy. God can be either the intolerant and implacable judge, or the Father of the prodigal son, the Abba of us all. The choice of which God the Latino/a communities will conjure is predicated on how committedly,

how vulnerably, how riskily, the Latino/a theologian commits himself or herself to theodicy, to the vindication, witness, coherence, and theological epiphany of the dangerous memory of Jesus.

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CHAPTER 8

Jesus the Christ

Neomi De Anda

After engaging the voluminous amount of work which Latin@¹ religious and theological scholars have dedicated to the topics of Jesus and Christ, I find myself scripting this chapter between (1) what Jacqueline Hidalgo expands as retrofitted memories, which “not only contest what we know about the past but also assume that the work of the present is unfinished” (Hidalgo 2013: 125), and (2) what Sandra Cisneros explains like this: “these stories are nothing but story, bits of string, odds and ends found here and there, embroidered together to make something new ... If, in the course of my inventing, I have inadvertently stumbled on the truth, *perdónenme*” (Cisneros 2002). Latina theological and religious scholars have engaged broader Christian tradition in developing ideas about Jesus and Christ. Many times Latina religious and theological scholars have also challenged and shown shortcomings in what has been considered historically mainstream Christian theological tradition. So the notion of retrofitted memory fits in these instances. In other places, Latino/a theologians and scholars of religion have engaged different and creative sources so as to expand even the foundations of what are considered Christian traditions. At those times, they embroidered together odds and ends to create something new à la Cisneros, yet with a christological emphasis.

I would like to begin with a list of the fifteen themes which can be found in Latina/o theological and religious studies but which I do not necessary develop in this chapter. Please do not think of this list as exhaustive, but rather as a quick reference guide for those seeking more from Latina christologies:

1. Galilean Jesus (Elizondo 2009; Ruiz 2011; Lee 2009, 2010)
2. Cristopersonalidad (Cavazos-González 2012)
3. Jesus is my uncle (Pedraja 1999)

4. Mestizo Jesus (González 2006; Goizueta 1992, 1995; Díaz 2011; Elizondo 2009)
5. Mulato Jesus (González 2006; Díaz 2011)
6. Jesus and acompañamiento (Goizueta 1992, 1995; González 2006; Alfaro 2012; Isasi-Díaz 2003)
7. Liberationist christology (Valentín 2010; Isasi-Díaz 2003; Alfaro 2012)
8. Walking with Jesus in the Barrio (Recinos 1989)
9. Exiled and migrant Jesus (Rivera 2009; Díaz 2011)
10. Relational christology (Isasi-Díaz 2003; De Anda 2011; Alfaro 2012)
11. Spirit Jesus (Alfaro 2012)
12. Jesus as Minister (Isasi-Díaz 2003; Alfaro 2012; Recinos 1989; González 2006)
13. Jesús Fiestero (Pérez Álvarez 1997)
14. Jesus as linker and non ranker (Herrera 1993)
15. Pentecostal christologies (Alfaro 2012; Sánchez-Walsh 2009)

A Map for this Christologizing Journey

As a Latina, many times I take the long path, with some cuentos² and canciones included, to reach my main points. I am presenting what may be called a Latinoa epistemological way, which often finds itself to be circular and/or spiral and/or tangential and mostly oral.³ I have chosen to take a similar path in writing this chapter rather than articulating a thesis statement at the beginning. I invite you to journey with me because being engrossed by the journey, as well as contending with the thoughts presented and the main theological points developed, I believe is one of the great gifts of Latinoa theologies and the abilities of their scholars to reclaim existing epistemologies from nuestra cotidianidad y nuestras comunidades. Throughout the chapter, we will uncover some of the kernels of wisdom which Latinoa imaginaries add, challenge, renew, and reformulate regarding Jesus the Christ. We will visit the notions of relationality, la encarnación y las encarnaciones, and *imago Dei*. We will also look beyond the great christological paradox, which has always caused theological excitement in churches, of what it means for Jesus to be fully human and fully divine to particular Latinoa christological complexities and contradictions in context. At the end, we will look ahead to see what future possible journeys should entail. I will sketch contributions to christology made by Latin@ theologians and scholars of religions.⁴ For the purposes of this chapter, I liberally apply Diana Hayes' notion of theologizing as God-talk (Hayes 2011: 22) to christologizing as Christ-talk. When many Latinoa theologians engage in Christ-talk, they seem to draw numerous connections between the notions of relationship with God, la encarnación, and *imago Dei*. I know this selection does not begin to encompass an exhaustive list of what Latina/os have proclaimed about Jesus, Christ, christology, *Imago Christi*, Word, Verbo, Jesucristo, etc. To accomplish this latter task, at least a two-volume work would be necessary, if not the dedication of scholars' entire lives' work.

Relationality

A repeated theme one finds in Latina christologies is relationality. To further describe the notion of God-talk and Christ-talk, I yield to Carmen Nanko-Fernández, who states, “I would contend that for Latin@ theologians, human beings, in all our particularity, constitute revelatory texts. Our God-talk [I add Christ-talk], in our vernacular, requires us to read in nuanced ways the contexts and contours of our situated humanity – in relationship” (Nanko-Fernández 2010: 51). As Nanko-Fernández claims, for Latino theologians, and I would add for many Latina contexts, our God and Christ-talk are based upon on our concrete, situated existences in relationship.

In “Jesus Christ My Faithful Companion”, Isasi-Díaz discusses notions of diversity and salvation in a christology which is more historical than dogmatic. Salvation is the responsibility of the whole human family, of the socio-political, and of the struggle for justice (2003: 165–6). Through personal relationships with the divine in others, people come to know Christ. She calls these people *alteri Christi* – other Christs (Isasi-Díaz 2003: 172). Through *Familia de Dios* – the kin-dom of God – Isasi-Díaz criticizes the unchangeability of the theological notion of the kingdom of God as it has developed through Christian history, with other theological notions presented in *Gaudium et Spes* from Vatican II and various writings from Liberation theology. Drawing on liberation theologies from the second half of the twentieth century, she concludes,

this is precisely what we mean when we say that Jesus is Christ: that he lived to the fullest his humanity and the mission that it entailed. Because what Jesus did in reference to the kingdom of God is within the human realm, other persons can also be mediators, can also be Christs. ... All who commit themselves to proclaim with their lives and deeds the kingdom of God are mediators of the kingdom. Each and every one of us has the capacity and possibility of being another Christ, an *alter Christus*. (Isasi-Díaz 2003: 161–2)

Sammy Alfaro in developing a Spirit-christology bases his notion on the relationality between the Spirit and Jesus. He states, “In this sense, Hispanic Pentecostals juxtapose the presence of Jesus and the Spirit, indicating that manner in which Jesus’ presence is manifested through the Spirit” (Alfaro 2012: 139). He finds these connections through the presentation of three coritos and concludes, “Thus, every Pentecostal/Charismatic manifestation that one may experience is ultimately understood as being closely connected to Jesus and the Spirit” (Alfaro 2012: 139). Yet Alfaro does not leave this relationality only between the Spirit and Jesus; he continues to build through the use of the corito *El Divino Compañero*. This song is not just a corito sung as part of a worship service; Alfaro also notes that “Jesus has been our constant friend and companion who has never let us down” (Alfaro 2012: 144–5). This theme of constant friend, companion, and accompaniment is one Alfaro continues to develop. The struggles of the immigrant journey and a way to

resist and subvert the “underempowerment” of being Hispanic in the southwest “includes walking in the presence of their Lord and Savior through the Spirit” (Alfaro 2012: 145). Through coritos Alfaro gleans that the relationality between Jesus and the Spirit also has social ramifications beyond personal individual relationships. He states that through these coritos one can find “hints at the social ramifications of a Christ who descends from his throne to be part of a poor family, and in that humility brings the world liberty and salvation” (Alfaro 2012: 142–3).

La Encarnación y Las Encarnaciones

The development of many Latinoa theologies express an affirmation for the tangible and sensual in our God-talk. The Christ-talk of Latinoa theological and religious scholars does not stray far from these tangible and sensual expressions. The focus upon US Popular Catholicism in relationship to Jesús by Roberto Goizueta (1995: 18–46) and the use of his specific example of the stations of the cross by Michelle González (2006: 17–18) provide examples of popular religious practices which root Latina/o Christ-talk. Luis Pedraja depends upon the notion of tangibility, going so far as to call christologies without “meat” a

Docetism [that] persists as a tempting heresy today. It is still far easier to believe in a faraway spiritual reality than it is to face the realities of human life. Even today the image of Jesus relevant in Christologies and other Christian doctrines still raises the question: Where is the body? When Christologies begin with Christ’s preexistence and end with his resurrection, they tend to leave the Incarnation lost in the middle. The result is a fancy theological sandwich that leaves us wondering where the ‘meat’ is. (Pedraja 1999: 73)

Benjamin Valentín discusses God become flesh in John 1:14 as a main christological imaginary (Valentín 2010: 99), and Loida Martell-Otero uses this same phrase, “*Dios hecho carne*” (Martell-Otero 2009: 75), to discuss God incarnate among the world. Ada María Isasi-Díaz believes that the incarnation of the divine in Jesus becomes incarnate time and time again in others across history (Isasi-Díaz 2003: 172).

With a small inclusion to be open to more gender diversity in this articulation, I agree with Luis Pedraja around notions of encarnación (Pedraja 1999: 75). Understanding encarnación as linked to “sibling,” “close friend,” and/or “family” connects to God sharing the same flesh as humanity. La encarnación of the gospels becomes las encarnaciones of humanity because we continue sharing that same flesh in the tangible and sensual natures of our lives and Christ-talk. But these encarnaciones move beyond a simple and only human understanding through our Christ-talk. The fact that God lived and lives as la encarnación immediately links the two natures of fully human and fully divine. Sammy Alfaro points to this link in his study of coritos, which themselves are sensual oral and/or auditory and/or visual experiences, in that some coritos point to the absolute humanity of Jesus “not as mere man but as God” (Alfaro 2012: 14). This new reality of las encarnaciones means we need to look beyond

the physical embodiment of Jesus become Christ of the gospels to understand pluralities and diversities of particular encarnaciones in their contexts. Loida Martell-Otero presents an example of las encarnaciones in a particular context. In reclaiming an incarnation for those made disincarnate by kyriarchal structures, such as women and children, she Christ-talks,

I believe that *sata* is an appropriate term because it is a specifically cultural term that aids in the articulation of a contextual Christology from a Puerto Rican perspective. I also believe it connotes the existential conjunction of *mestizaje* and periphery. It expresses the experience of being peripheralized – stereotyped, rejected, and insulted by the hegemonic centers of society. It underscores the experience of being relegated to the bottom rung of society precisely as one who is perceived to be nonhuman, impure, and of no intrinsic value – *sobraja*. To us *sato/a* as a Christological term is to raise the specter of the theological scandal of the incarnation. No one wants to be called a *sato/a*. No one wants to be reminded of his or her status of inferiority and rejection in this society. *Sato/a* connotes precisely those elements of pain, loss, and utter rejection from which so many seek to escape ... To speak of the *Jesús sato*, then, is to speak of Jesus' nonidealized, concretely historical, peripherally placed, *mestizo*, struggling, seeking, hoping human being-ness. It is to acknowledge that the One the tradition has identified as fully divine is also carnal. (Martell-Otero 2009: 83)

While the christological notion of *mestizaje* presented by Martell-Otero, Pedraja, González, Elizondo, Goizueta, and others has been challenged and complexified by Néstor Medina (2009), and I do not find the need to take up this particular discourse here, the mixed realities of various Latino encarnaciones should remain a central part of Latino religious and theological scholars' Christ-talk.

In another example, Sammy Alfaro points to immigrants crossing the Mexico/USA border depending upon *El Coyote Místico* (Alfaro 2012: 146) because las encarnaciones of the coyotes directing their journeys across the border are, many times, violent and oppressive. In this account, those who are involved in these dangerous journeys draw upon la encarnación of the social prophet (Alfaro 2012: 147) found in the gospels to guide and protect their lives and encarnaciones. This account further shows that when one moves from a single encarnación to las encarnaciones in lived particular contexts, realities become messy, complicated, and even sinful. For this reason, notions of silenced, marginalized, oppressed encarnaciones of Latinos and the call to constant structural repair from systemic broken sinfulness must remain part of the prophetic edge of Latin@ christological scholars' endeavors.

Imago Dei

In making a case for an embodied *imago Dei* and its relationship to la encarnación, Luis Pedraja states, "Just as God created our world and gave us life, God also made a place for the divine to be present within human flesh. Thus, the Incarnation affirms

that all human beings can bear the image of God (*imago dei*). But it also affirms that this image is not just spiritual but also embodied in human flesh" (Pedraja 1999: 77). La encarnación then "demands that we ground our Christologies at the place where we encounter God: in the midst of human life ... [and] forces all of us to reconsider our views on our bodily existence. Furthermore, it affirms that our existence as flesh and blood is a part of God's good creation – a part that is not alien to God" (Pedraja 1999: 84).

Under the auspices of the kin-dom of God, Isasi-Díaz makes an excellent connection which I think many Latina theologians, myself included, have implied with the *imago Dei*. She states, around the notion that Jesus was the definitive mediator of the kingdom of God in that no one else can do what another has done,

In this sense each of us is unique, as Jesus was. Each of us also mediates the kingdom of God in an essential way and in a way that would not happen without us. This is so because each and every one of us is an image of God or *imago dei*: each and every one of us carries seeds of divinity that make who we are capable of being and what we are capable of doing essential to the unfolding of the kingdom of God ... It continues in us and with us. (Isasi-Díaz 2003: 162)

For many Latinoas, *imago Dei* is not individual and selfish but based on webbed connections of life. I agree with Isasi-Díaz that this notion of kin-dom does not find limits to blood relatives. Rather it encompasses "those who are united by bonds of friendship, of love and care, of community" (Isasi-Díaz 2003: 163). For Isasi-Díaz, this kin-dom is found in *familia* where a sense of home exists and one feels the safety

to become fully oneself. ... From a very young age, Latinas begin to understand that because of our families we do not have to face the world alone. ... It is in the midst of *familia* and because of *familia* that at a very young age we are introduced to the ethical world of responsibilities and obligations, a world where one is because one is in relationship to others. (Isasi-Díaz 2003: 164)

Like Gary Riebe-Estrella (1999: 172–88), Ada Maria Isasi-Díaz also uses the notions of comadrazgo, compadrazgo, madrinas, and padrinos as formal communal expansions (Isasi-Díaz 2003: 164–5).

From a Latina Christian epistemology, *imago Dei* insists we contend with disincarnating structures. As Loida Martell-Otero states, "Latinas face the quadruple oppression of color, class, culture, and gender. They are dehumanized and dismissed as *sobras* and *estorbos* – a problem that needs to be eradicated" (Martell-Otero 2009: 83). Latinoas do live and juggle among an ever-changing matrix of oppressions, forgotten stories and privileges which include but are not limited to color, class, culture, gender, hair, sexuality, size, shape, and so on. At times this ever-changing matrix allows privileges within and among Latinoas and does not make us free from the ability to oppress, marginalize, and/or sin against others, including other Latinoas.

In one example of trying to work against the historical silencing of some particularly Mexican and Mexican American perspectives, and while I do not wish to overlook the virgin/whore dichotomy presented often in theology and literature, I do wish to point out that one place to find an instance of *imago Dei* through the body of Mary, the mother of Jesus, comes through the writings of Mexican convent nun Sor María Anna Agueda de San Ignacio (Puebla, 1695–1756) (De Anda 2011: 72). For the mystic María Anna, the sinful split of humanity from God is circumvented through the person and apparitions of Maria de la leche. Through this guise, God created Mary as a perfect mirror image of God-self. She states, “Querido Dios nuestro Señor dares â conocer â los hombres, y siendo, como es, infinito, y por esso inconocible, diòse â conocer por una pura criatura, haciéndola su poder, favor, y amor, tan admirable, tan prodigiosa, y rara, que por ella se diera â conocer su Author” (Águeda de San Ignacio 1758: 2). For María Anna, la encarnacion y las encarnaciones find fullness of life and unity with God through Mary’s own encarnación, particularly her breast milk.

Articulating and Contending with a Great Paradox: The Beginnings of a Constructive Contribution

As stated in the section “A Map for this Christologizing Journey,” Latinoa religious and theological scholars have not only thoughtfully engaged the great christological paradox and perplexity that Jesus was fully human and fully divine, but also embody a great paradox of at least two major frameworks at play in these articulations. Like game designers whose role is to select and simplify experiences,⁵ as a theologian I will selectively reduce the nomenclature of these two major frameworks to (1) Cartesian rugged individualism and (2) *nosotras*.

A description of a Cartesian rugged individualism includes behaviorist and reward-based, uncontrolled, capitalist notions of competition for the self and self-sufficiency, which not only live out the myth that one can accomplish anything by one’s own talents and abilities but also mean that this self-sufficiency does not need to pay attention to others whom it tramples, colonizes, oppresses, and/or uses on one’s way to accomplish said life. In an extreme form, this Cartesian rugged individualism lives out the myth that these talents and abilities which the self inscribes to accomplish this self-sufficiency are gifts/graces from God.

The notion of *nosotras* has been developing through Latinoa God-talk for a number of years and in a number of ways. Teresa Chavez Saucedo states, “Created out of God’s for-otherness, our humanity is expressed in our own for-otherness for God as well as for creation and for other human beings” (quoted in Díaz 2011: 266). In using the work of Juan Carlos Scannone, Roberto Goizueta states, “In an authentic community, the identity of the ‘we’ does not extinguish the ‘I’; the Spanish word for ‘we’ is ‘*nosotros*,’ which literally means ‘we others,’ a community of *otros*, or others” (Goizueta 1992: 57). According to Miguel Díaz, “The word [*nosotros*] suggests that communal unity cannot come about without affirming distinct others” (Díaz 2011: 266). As a Latina, I am

concerned about notions of being lost among crowds and communities, but these articulations show that *nosotras* does not mean loss of agency. I would further like to describe *nosotras* as others always living with and among others. In this description *nosotras*, las encarnaciones, live messy, complex realities; not voluntarily or in idealistic or romanticized ways, but through the contradictions in grace-filled and sinful moments where rupture and disjunction have potential to lead them to more grace-filled and/or sinful moments as inheritors of a non-innocent history. Furthermore, the thin line drawn through *nosotras* articulates my own critical assessment that the perspective presented in this chapter is limited by Christian influences.

To extrapolate how these two major frameworks can be found playing throughout Latinoa christological imaginaries, I will begin with a cuento.

Cuento Uno: Santa Claus and Diosito

Beginning this chapter during Advent reminds me of when I was a young child, somewhere between three and four, a few years before I had the language of sin and confession in my vocabulary. I remember almost as soon as I had a thought of acting in some way against *proper niña behavior*, my mom ¿y quien sabe cómo ya se lo sabía ella? Y ¡antes de que yo hiciera nada, nada! would tell me one of two things with her right eyebrow raised. She would either say, “Santa is making his list and checking it twice” or “¡Diosito te esta viendo!” I knew that Santa would not bring my gifts due to my poor behavior. I was unsure, however, whether there were any physical consequences to making Diosito angry or hurting Diosito. I did know that the actions which yielded *this* response from my mother were far graver, though. I recognized already at this young age that the consequences would be far more severe were I to wound, injure, and/or sever my relationship with this omnipresent Diosito: the little God, the baby we see in the manger, baby Jesus born on Christmas Day, the Christ Child, and so on.

I share this cuentito for three main reasons. First, the interplay between my bilingual/binational/at least bicultural existences serves as only one of many examples which manifests deep tensions within Latino/a theologies when discussing Jesus the Christ y las encarnaciones. This tension reveals itself primarily through the way the very notion “Jesus the Christ” is understood. I use this cuentito to highlight some of my earliest memories of my bilingual/binational/at least bicultural existence to show the deeply embedded roots of my own christological reflections presented here.

Second, I use this cuentito because it unmasks a number of my own contexts, biases, and perspectives. I am a Tejana, born and raised in a bilingual, binational, and at least bicultural life. I am a hand-me-down-cunita Catholic, baptized on the fourth day of Christmas on December 28. Having seen less than two months of life at this point, the visit to la iglesia de Santo Angel was one of my first journeys beyond the borders of my *nina* and *nino*’s (maternal grandparents/godparents’) home to the larger city of El Paso, Texas. During the actual historical time of this cuentito, my parents

and I lived no more than a mile from the Mexico/USA border in an apartment behind my abuelito/as'⁶ (paternal grandparents') home. The Mexico/USA border, therefore, was a part of my cotidianidad and has centrally shaped my worldview. I will return to this second point later during the constructive piece of this chapter, after pulling thematic contributions.

Third, and to follow Sammy Alfaro, "Let me begin by retelling some stories that serve as foundational to my christological reflection, for I believe that Hispanic Pentecostal theology [I add Latina Catholic] is best expressed in a medium that is similar to its nature: narrative" (Alfaro 2012: 143). As Alfaro uses *coritos* and *cuentos* to elucidate the imagining of "The Jesus of Hispanic Pentecostal Spirituality" (Alfaro 2012: 148), so Ada María Isasi-Díaz recollects, "Sometimes the only way to understand who *Jesucristo* is for us and how he is present in our lives is through stories" (Isasi-Díaz 2003: 175). Teresa Delgado also states,

cuento ... shows us the contradictions evident in the context of the writer specifically and of the human community in general. The most memorable literary creations are the ones which are parabolic ... they push us to the edge of our reality and leave us there with the responsibility of a conclusion. They expose the contradictions at work in the lives of the characters we read about and quite possibly in our own lives in ways that may have gone unrecognized before. (Delgado 2002: 26–7)

To further investigate these contradictions in context, I rely on another *cuento* used by some Latin@ theologians in developing christological imaginaries.

Cuento Dos: Who Is it Said that I Am? A Focus on Mark 8:27–30

Now Jesus and his disciples set out for the villages of Caesarea Philippi. Along the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" They said in reply, "John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others one of the prophets." And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter said to him in reply, "You are the Messiah." Then he warned them not to tell anyone about him.

I also share the Spanish version, so as to have a fuller base from which to interpret the passage generally and the pronouns more particularly.

Jesús salió con sus discípulos hacia los poblados de Cesarea de Filipo, y en el camino les preguntó: "¿Quién dice la gente que soy yo?" Ellos le respondieron: "Algunos dicen que eres Juan el Bautista; otros, Elías; y otros, alguno de los profetas". "Y ustedes, ¿quién dicen que soy yo?" Pedro respondió: "Tú eres el Mesías." Jesús les ordenó terminantemente que no dijeran nada acerca de él.

Taking into account *cuentos*, taking seriously the popular term *Jesucristo*, *mujerista* theology provides a creative space, still respectful of church teachings, where current

historical beliefs about Jesus Christ blossom and allow for a move away from making normative, past historical christological formulae (Isasi-Díaz 2003: 159). For Isasi-Díaz, this move follows in the tradition of the gospel writers to create and build narratives of Jesus which respond(ed) to issues of the historical moment. For her, the melding of *Jesucristo* allows for a christology which “sustains and motivates us (Latinas) in our everyday struggles against what limits liberation-fullness of life and for all that promotes justice and peace” (Isasi-Díaz 2003: 159).

A number of Latinoa theologians have used Mark 8:27–30 to develop and discuss christological imaginaries and possibilities. I wish to focus on these authors because their attention to the various questions presented in these verses highlights this paradox, tension, and contradiction in context within Latinoa studies of religion and theologies, a paradox which I think finds its roots in issues of living these particular contexts within the forces of the USA. As stated earlier, this tension finds itself in the interplay between the Cartesian rugged individual and *mesotras* frameworks. I also focus on these verses because they further highlight how particularly Latina theologians have used biblical references as a basis for christological imaginaries.

One of the earliest published christological reflections from a Latina theologian can be found in the article “Who Do You Say Jesus Is? Christological Reflections from a Hispanic Woman’s Perspective” (1993) by Marina Herrera (Valentín 2010: 97). In this article, Herrera “finds the blond-haired, blue-eyed images of Jesus, and the images of the triumphant, invulnerable, glorified, transcendent Christ in Northern European and American traditions to be in need of some correction” (Valentín 2010: 98). Herrera articulates, “Emmanuel or ‘God-with-us’ says best who Jesus is for me. This title stresses the way he was present to everything – water and rocks, flowers and birds, sinners and saints, poor and rich, young and old, males and females, the sick and the well” (Herrera 1993: 88). She also presents her own experiential representations of Jesus: “From my earliest prayers, Jesus emerged as someone quite separate and distinct from God. Jesus was one *to want* to imitate and follow because he was a child like me, but I reserved my love for God” (Herrera 1993: 74). According to Valentín, Herrera not only suggests alternatives for representations of Jesus but also “puts forth is a critique of modern Western social culture” (Valentín 2010: 101).

Ada Maria Isasi-Díaz wrestles with some of the very difficult christological issues present not only for feminists but for most women. Isasi-Díaz took time to expand a Mujerista christology in “Christ in Mujerista Theology” (Isasi-Díaz 2003). From within a marginalized Latina’s *lucha* for fullness of life (the first major point), she uses “Who do you say that I am?” (Mark 8:29) to introduce three more major points of what Latinas believe about Christ. She later develops three christological themes based upon these initial reflections. “When one talks about a christology that emerges from the practice of faith and the personal experience of being a disciple of Jesus, one may be accused of embracing a free-for-all and an everything-goes attitude. This criticism sets relativity over against what is absolutely right” (Isasi-Díaz 2003: 157).

Isasi-Díaz also asks Jesus to “(i)dentificate con nosotros” (Isasi-Díaz 2003: 157). Yet, in her third point, her deployment of “consciences” and “want me to do” seem to point to a more individualistic interpretation of Mark 8:29:

Christology, as with all religious beliefs, follows our ethical stance ... In other words, when we begin to explicitly think religiously, we ascribe to Jesus or to God or to whatever concept of the divine we are beginning to form, the ideas we have elaborated about the good. At the personal level answers to questions like, ‘Who is Jesus?’ ‘What does Jesus want me to do?’ ‘What would Jesus do if he were here?’ are not based on our knowledge of Jesus. It is the other way around: the answers we give to these questions reveal to us what it is that our consciences are telling us. (Isasi-Díaz 2003: 158)

Within many of these writers a tension exists in Latina/o theologies. These writers try to build their christology upon the question, “Who do you say that I am?” yet they seem to want to move beyond just this question, and here is where the tension seems to climax. All of these scholars, as have I, have been trained in a system which perpetuates a Cartesian rugged individualistic ontological framework where the self is understood as a single entity which may choose whether or not to coexist. Yet, as a Latina (a Tejana, more particularly), I was taught to always think of myself in relation to others, hence the negative relational outcome of hurting Diosito found in my earlier cuento. For me to even use the first person singular often bears false witness to my own identities, contexts, social locations, yet this notion of first person or self is also deeply embedded in my views of life, hence my mother’s use of Santa Claus to stop my bad behavior. My hunch is that the tension that arises in the way Latin@ christologies have developed exists because we, as Latin@s, largely think of ourselves as *nosotras*, yet also live/have been forced to live by strong realities and structural pressures as Cartesian rugged individuals. Loida Martell-Otero uses both questions from Mark 8:27–30: “Who do people say that I am?” “Who do you say that I am?” as a way to move beyond an individualistic notion (Martell-Otero 2009: 74).

Isasi-Díaz alludes to this notion of *nosotras* as an invitation for “Christ Jesus to identify himself with us and to be in solidarity with us” (Isasi-Díaz 2003: 157). Yet, for Isasi-Díaz, the choice still seemingly exists on JesuCristo’s part as to whether or not to be in relationship with us. In my understanding of *nosotras*, we do not have a choice other than to live, engage the world, and live as a conglomeration of others, which through Christ-talk means *las encarnaciones*. Néstor Medina rightly states that “In decolonial terms, for Latinas/os *Ego Cogito* must be replaced with *nosotros existimos y vivimos!*” (Néstor Medina 2013: 13). This statement presents not only a new epistemological move but an articulation of what seems to have existed as a tension within Latina/o theologies since its inception and is representative of many of our communities. And in being able to articulate this messy and contradictory *nosotras*, we may also be able to lessen the negative powers of the Cartesian rugged individual.

Returning to cuento dos, the Spanish translation of Mark 8:27–30 uses the second person plural but the English translation, many times, is interpreted as using the

second person singular. Here we see how language translation may feed into a Cartesian rugged individualism or *nosotras*. I am not saying that the English translation is always interpreted as the second person singular, because “you” may be plural as often as it may be singular, but the Spanish translation cannot be interpreted as the second person singular. Therefore, the Spanish translation of the text, as well as a second person plural interpretation of “you” in the English translation of the text read from a Latina perspective, may take the words “you” and “ustedes” to be situated within a framework of *nosotros*. Therefore, because of *nosotras* and understanding Jesus as *nosotras* from this Tejana’s perspective, the response to Mark 8:27–30 must always (1) include all of the verses, (2) be read aloud,⁷ and (3) highlight the final verse which instructs those engaging the story to tell no one, probably because the next community engaging the text must respond to this account from their context.

Because of *imago Dei*, not only is God El Dios de Nosotros (Díaz 2011: 266), but we are *nosotras* de divinidad. God not only desires to be known by us but created us in God’s own image and likeness, so we may know what it means to live with God de *nosotras* y *nosotras* de divinidad. Here is a crux of Latin@ christologies: to be able to move from compartmentalized dichotomies to more ambiguous realities! This crux serves as a bridge to look beyond dichotomies of only existing in a framework of one or another individual self to living at least biculturally. This cruz also allows for critical reflections of our own realities, enmeshed in the complexities of at least two ways of living in the world which many times seem to be presented in opposition to each other. As Luis Pedraja writes, “In Jesus, both divinity and humanity are fully present ... This doctrine requires us to affirm a paradox: that Jesus was fully human and fully divine. Yet in affirming such a paradox we also destroy the opposition of humanity and divinity by constructing a new reality” (Pedraja 1999: 82). The lives of Latin@s contending constantly with at least these two frameworks at play reveal a *crisología* de encarnaciones which allows for the repeated (re)membering of our own non-innocent histories, and the relationship with divinity which not only remains with us but also desires us to remain in relationship with one another so as to remain in relationship with divinity.

Last Stop on this Journey

Living Jesus the Christ as *nosotras* and las encarnaciones may begin to answer some of the questions posed by Michael Lee about how to maintain Latina/o theologies which attend to those most affected and afflicted by poverty while attending to different experiences of being Latin@ (Lee 2010: 112–13).

Two short examples show how cultural trends both contend with this paradox of the Cartesian rugged individual and *nosotras* and can easily have more impact than Latino/a christologies in articulations of how our communities christologize. These examples wrestle with understandings of “success” and in some ways are

presenting christological alternatives with strong dichotomies and (re)inscription of Cartesian rugged individualistic frameworks, many times to larger audiences than those reached by Latin@ scholarly christological scholarly articulations, while also exemplifying the tension between *nosotras* and these Cartesian frameworks.

Example One: Ricky Martin's "Copa de la vida"

As Gilberto Cavazos-González states, "Video like sculpture, painting and other art forms 'might not focus directly on a religious subject but nonetheless might reveal the human situation in its conflicts.' The writer and director who can bear and express guilt, who can experience meaning within the context of meaninglessness, therefore, are doing religion" (Cavazos-González 2009: 1, quoting Sandon 2005). So Martin himself may not have been trying to make a christological point, but listeners/readers/singers who engage this song may be understanding it in a christological way but may be drawing upon their own experience, particularly in these lines:

La vida es
competición...
la copa es
la bendición.

My Marianist Catholic formation provides one lens for me to interpret the Spanish version of this 1998 World Cup theme song in a christological way. I would like to note that the christological themes I draw from the Spanish version do not exist in the English translation. I think this song shows some very interesting points. First, I take the title, "La copa de la vida," as a eucharistic christological notion drawn from various Catholic liturgies and imaginaries. Second, this christological theme highlights complexities of *nosotras* and Cartesian rugged individual perspectives. This song seems to be all about competition, which can be understood as solely from a Cartesian rugged individualistic perspective, yet placed in the context of this song as a theme song for the Fútbol World Cup, the notion of being for and with others automatically becomes part of the context, as any team sport does not meet its goal with only an individual. Yet the goal is still one of competition, and notions of power and socioeconomics quickly become intertwined in the mix of this song. I use this example to highlight the impact of Latin@s from the USA not only on the USA but on so much of the world, and of how something that seems as simple and meaningless as a song can carry strong messages of complexities, including an inherent specific Christian understanding, to the rest of the world. Furthermore, this song with its strong christological themes becomes a cultural expression designed to be sold and consumed, which perpetuates the utilitarian understandings which can be found in Cartesian rugged individualistic perspectives.

Example Two: Maria Hinojosa and Two Selves

Maria Hinojosa told a story on *Latino USA* (a radio journal) in 2014 which included the statement, “I wanted the Latina teens there to know that for generations we have been riding that line between our two selves. There’s our traditional, often Catholic Latina selves, bound to family and community. And conversely our strong, free-thinking, open-minded American selves.”

This particular example very overtly shows a false dichotomy which can easily be presented when only using a Cartesian rugged individualistic epistemology, particularly the need to compartmentalize notions of self. This framework makes us desire to strictly categorize and split parts of our lives through understandings of self. Hinojosa’s use of such strict boundaries between two selves means such things as “Catholic cannot mean free-thinking or preferably critical-thinking and strong” and “being American should not include community or family.” Furthermore, this dichotomy limits the term “America” to the boundaries of the USA and much more closely to a strict rugged individualistic framework. Hinojosa’s statement seems to manifest an art of resistance where compartmentalizing assists in navigating the system. Yet, if we use a more complex and ambiguous *nosotras* epistemological framework, we can see that we constantly juggle boundaries of US-othering.

Popular culture easily allows for surface representations of Latina/o christological and religious experiences. Without understanding that numerous Latino/as contend with many paradoxes, complexities, and contradictions in context, among them the frameworks of *nosotras* and Cartesian rugged individualism, such superficial representations in popular media of the realities of our communities make them further dichotomized, demonized, and easily marginalized, and even more so now as a way to contend with the growing numbers of Latino/as in Canada and the USA.

Christological Nuggets for Pondering

Thinking about Jesus the Christ as part of *nosotras* encarna senses of mutuality where the questions posed in Mark 2:27–30 must be both asked and answered by community members and various communities. Thinking of Jesus the Christ among *nosotras* means las encarnaciones live and deal with the daily messiness, the joyful, painful, and contradictory moments, of life. Jesus the Christ in this sense becomes articulated in more plural realities present in the world.

Many times, we hear the words “¡Te lo/a encargo!” when a loved one is not continuing on the same journey to denote the sacred bond found within *nosotras*. In this sense *nosotras* continues a mission of caring for and attending to others as they are also meant to attend and care for us. In this particular phrase and many like it, even in the journey itself, the belief necessary to continue living as *nosotras* is perpetuated.

Future Journeys

While this journey comes to an end, many points demand attention. Here are some of the places where I think we need further development in Latinoa Christ-talk. First, we need more historical retrieval, particularly of women's voices from America Latina. Second, we need more reflection on our ecumenical and inter-religious realities. Third, we need to attend to challenges presented by the prosperity gospel. Fourth, we need more concrete sociocultural studies of Latinoa religious experiences in the USA and Canada. Fifth, we need to pay closer attention to notions of kenosis. Sixth, we must continue to construct broader notions on divinity. *Y se lo/as encarga\os* because this work cannot continue with only one person.

Notes

- 1 While I prefer to use the formulation of this term given in Cruz, DeAnda, and Medina (2013: 5), namely, "*LatinaXo*" with each character in a different color, because
 1. The inclusive "a" and "o" expresses the feminist critique of the dominant male ending in the Spanish language.
 2. The "X" between the "a" and "o" points to the need to omit an often created gender binary and allows for more fluidity as the "X" can also be seen as bridging the "o" and the "a" together.
 3. The multiple colors signify the diversity of our communities with particular attention to race, ethnicity and sexuality.
 4. The thin horizontal line symbolizes that no matter which descriptor is used for identifying our communities, none fully engage/reveal the complexity of realities.
 5. We understand the aforementioned list to be descriptive and limited not prescriptive and all encompassing.

I have chosen to use a plurality of other formulations in this chapter because of its black-and-white print nature.

- 2 I do not italicize or differentiate Spanish as a foreign language because it was the first language used for publication in what is now the USA; in many places found within the borders and territories of the USA, Spanish is used as much as if not more than English still today; and I was raised fully bilingual, not understanding Spanish to be a foreign language.
- 3 Eliseo Pérez Álvarez (1997) invokes the term "memory" to discuss similar notions.
- 4 I use this form of this term for people who (1) hold advanced degrees in studies of religions, scriptures, and/or theologies; (2) claim to be of some heritage considered under this broad umbrella; and (3) have published on a topic related to christology.
- 5 Thank you to Michael Anthony De Anda for this insight.
- 6 I use the "o/a" ending here to denote that both my grandparents were involved in what happened in this location
- 7 On reading scripture aloud see Jean-Pierre Ruiz (2011).

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CHAPTER 9

Theological Musings toward a Latina/o Pneumatology

Néstor Medina

God is not God in isolation. God's divinity is grounded in the full dynamic of relationships and interrelationships that form the Trinity, making divinity a reality found in a dynamic cooperative relationship.

(Pedraja 1994: 54)

Latina/o theologians have engaged on a first-level reconfiguration of traditional approaches to the theological task. Not often following the inherited theological grammar of traditional theological frames, they have nevertheless and intentionally engaged those traditional themes and contributed great insights both to the how of theology (method) and to the what of theology (content). That said, one would be hard pressed to find any substantial work dealing explicitly with the work and nature of the Spirit in Latina/o theology. Certainly, there are volumes that explicitly allude to the Spirit, but most of those get at the Spirit through an emphasis on another theological topic. I will discuss these works as part of the first portion of this chapter. The apparent dearth of writings on pneumatology does not mean that one cannot find allusions to the Spirit and the Spirit's activity in the writings of Latinas/os. It does point, however, to a significant gap in Latina/o theology. Some Latinas/os have connected the nature and activity of the Spirit to debates on Mariology, and offer us creative insights for building a Latina/o pneumatology. In the second section of this chapter, I briefly mention their contributions, noting the serious challenge they pose to established pneumatologies by including women's embodied experiences as a way to talk about the Spirit. I write this chapter on pneumatology with the caveat that these are only preliminary musings that deserve further elaboration and intentional engagement by Latina/o theologians. In the third section, I constructively propose some aspects that I believe will contribute to

the further development and enrichment of such a Latina/o pneumatology. No doubt the Latina/o theologians I mention deserve fuller examination; their works are rich sources of theological insights. For reasons of space, however, here I will only engage those aspects that I find pertinent to this discussion on Latina/o pneumatology. Each of the authors I draw from approach concerns on pneumatology from their own theological and denominational traditions. I write as a Latino Canadian Pentecostal with profound Catholic and Presbyterian roots. Thus, here, my goal is first and foremost to flesh out the contributions that these specific scholars have made to the study of pneumatology, and how they can serve as resources in the task of articulating a Latina/o pneumatology.

Latina/o Contributions to Pneumatology

In his now classic *The Liberating Spirit*,¹ Eldín Villafañe (1993) reminds us that it is the reality of the Spirit as the presupposed force which moves believers into developing a praxis of social transformation. For him, the relational mutual process between the divine Spirit and believers and the resulting social transformation begins in the context of the worship service; there one finds manifest the truly contextualized spirituality of Latina/o Pentecostals. The worship service, he claims, is “the *locus* of manifestation of the Spirit” (Villafañe 1993: 150). Villafañe highlights the quest of Latina/o Pentecostal spirituality for community, within which one can find an implicit (pneumatological) theological discourse in the form of preaching, coritos, testimonios, and ofrendas, all of which are characterized by spontaneity, creativity, and intense participation (Villafañe 1993: 115, 119, 127–9).

Villafañe’s views on spirituality and the activity of the Spirit are articulated within a framework of the fourfold gospel, in which the Spirit is perceived as completing the work initiated by Jesus Christ.² In other words, the Spirit unites believers with God, creating the context within which people encounter the love of God in Jesus Christ (Villafañe 1993: 166). Because of the work of the Spirit, the community of believers exhibits characteristics of the Reign of God – which is the historical project of the Spirit, and which was embodied by Christ himself (Villafañe 1993: 184). The human spirituality of Jesus serves as the pattern for Christian living and for the human encounter with the divine Spirit. But like Jesus’ spirituality, Latina/o Pentecostal spirituality is not disembodied; it encompasses all aspects of life, embracing the heart and mind (Villafañe 1993: 131, 152). It is in this process of holistic transformation that the Spirit, as the empowering force, moves the community to resist sinful social structures of oppression and to embrace the work of bringing God’s reign to completion (Villafañe 1993: 171–85, 200–1). Social transformation is, Villafañe claims, a crucial characteristic of the activity of the Spirit. In the context of the US, where many Latinas/os experience marginalization and discrimination, the Spirit’s transforming activity of social reality includes the reclamation and appreciation of Latina/o culture and history (Villafañe 1993: 198–9).

Much more can be said of Villafaña's "ethics of Pneumatology." His work is a welcome invitation to be mindful of the activity of the Spirit in the social context; the Spirit is conceived as near, present, and active, enabling believers to counter structures of sin and evil. Crucial in his work is the understanding that the activity of the Spirit is an offshoot of the activity of Christ; the Spirit operates mainly to complete the work initiated by Christ.³ Consistent with traditional perspectives of pneumatology, the Spirit's activity remains subordinate to and framed only within the work of Christ. I wonder if we can speak about the Spirit on the merits of the Spirit alone and without placing the Spirit in a subordinate position.

The second author that I wish to engage is Samuel Soliván. His book *Spirit, Pathos and Liberation* (1998), written at the height of Latina/o theological production in the 1990s, offers another way of getting at pneumatology by engaging debates on human suffering, injustice, and divine (im)passibility. He articulates a corrective to pervasive ideas of *orthodoxy* and *orthopraxy*, which he views as incomplete because of their inability to engage the reality of suffering in the world. On one hand, *orthodoxy* has reduced divine revelation to propositional truths and has forgotten about the communities that live the faith and experience suffering, oppression, and poverty. On the other hand, *orthopraxy* is preoccupied with academic theological reflection on the praxis of others and has distanced itself from the very context and reality of suffering where people live the faith. He proposes a bridge to these two in *orthopathy*, which seeks to discern the ways in which the divine is involved in changing the reality of suffering without losing a focus on the people themselves ("Spirit-filled and Spirit-led" Latina/o Pentecostals) who suffer and experience injustice and poverty (Soliván 1998: 9, 11).

In Soliván's scheme, *orthopathos* as a theological category elucidates the fact that Latina/o theology emerges from the experiences of injustice and oppression confronted from day to day by Latinas/os. Furthermore, *orthopathos* makes evident that people are able to confront and struggle to change such conditions of injustice and oppression precisely because of the divine Spirit's work. Latinas/os Pentecostals take leaps of faith in the long journey of darkness and suffering because they "learn to see and hear the inner voice of the Spirit of God" (Soliván 1998: 26). In the music of El Barrio and the *coríto*s of the (Pentecostal) churches we hear people's dependence on the Spirit as a source of transformational strength; this music serves as testimony to the fact that despair and apathy will not have the final word (Soliván 1998: 27). The divine *orthopathos*, then, points to the power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers acting to transform suffering and despair into hope and wholeness. *Orthopathos* unmask the reality of suffering and puts on display the divine (and human) commitment to change situations of injustice at the root of suffering.

Like Villafaña's, Soliván's pneumatology hinges on christology; the turn toward hope-full suffering is predicated on the liberating power of Jesus Christ. In this kenotic christology, the incarnation, the life of Jesus, including his crucifixion and resurrection, exemplify new ways to understand power and powerlessness.⁴ "The self-emptying of Christ is a paradigm for dealing with power from the perspective of the victim, the

powerless, without succumbing to a destructive or pathic fatalism" (Soliván 1998: 79). Kenotic christology means that Christ identifies with the oppressed: "His identification with sufferers is a manifesto [for] the world that suffering no longer goes unchallenged nor its causes unjudged" (Soliván 1998: 82). It shows that the divine is located among those who suffer. Furthermore, the activity of the Spirit transforms the conditions that cause so many to suffer, transforming the very lives of believers and pushing them to become agents of change. The presence of the Spirit is the catalyst agent that brings about the transformation of drug addicts and alcoholics, for example, and calls them to new life in Jesus (Soliván 1998: 104). Soliván's Christocentric scheme delivers for us a vision of the Spirit's outworking as expression of the divine *orthopathos*, with the work of Christ providing the structures and interpretive framing for understanding the work of the Spirit. In the end, the Spirit again points back to Christ (Soliván 1998: 106, 130).

In another article, Soliván challenges the subordination of the Spirit in traditional approaches by affirming that a Trinitarian approach can result in preventing it (Soliván 1997: 51). Here he distances himself from the *Filioque* clause, asserting that pneumatology is the study of the one sent by the Father and promised by the Son. In contrast to his book on *orthopathos*, the activity of the Spirit does not figure as an offshoot of the activity of Christ. This time he focuses on the personalization of the Spirit as an essential aspect in upholding the *imago Dei* of Latina/o Pentecostals. He writes that those who are treated as non-persons are empowered by the person of the Spirit to reclaim their sense of personhood and self-esteem (Soliván 1997: 53). This activity is expressed concretely in the event of Pentecost, which symbolizes the divine Spirit's participation in this reclamation of the *imago Dei*.

Pentecost, as narrated in the book of Acts chapter 2, points to the Spirit's unique agency in establishing the original order of creation as intended by God, namely, inclusivity and unity in diversity (Soliván 1998: 58). The event of Pentecost is a concrete example of the divine Spirit's rejection of any notion of ethnocultural uniformity. At the same time, it creates the conditions for the celebration of diversity while pushing humanity toward unity. These two forces – simultaneously toward diversity and unity – are signs of the Reign of God and an essential part of God's saving grace (Soliván 1998: 62). Here, Soliván describes the Spirit as actively involved to empower believers to overcome their tendencies to "lord over others" and to resist those who want to "lord over them." Despite the fact that his article was published before his book, I found here a richer, fluid, more dynamic pneumatology that connects with the Trinity, and is not entirely subordinate to the activity of the Son. In this article, there is greater correspondence between the activity of the Spirit (divine pneumatological agency) and the activity of believers (human agency) in attempting to create the possibilities for another possible world, which for Soliván can only be built by Spirit-filled people (Soliván 1998: 63).

The final scholar I wish to briefly mention in this section is Oscar García-Johnson. In his book *The Mestizo/a Community of the Spirit: A Postmodern Latino/a Ecclesiology*

(2009), he sets out to write a practical theology of the Spirit. He begins his proposal by pointing out that Latina/o theologians operate within a *modern* understanding of culture, which leaves the *historical transcendent Spirit of God* out of the theological equation (García-Johnson 2009: 22, 48). As an alternative, he proposes that a Latina/o theology of the Spirit necessitates a “postmodern” and “postcolonial” reconfiguration of the notion of culture (García-Johnson 2009: 49). As part of this reconfiguration, he draws on Alejandro García Rivera’s triadic sign approach, noting that *culture* is the best category for speaking of the church and the divine activity in the world.⁵ In other words, since the church is the concrete expression and result of the encounter between the Spirit and humanity, and since creating culture is the way by which the Christian community responds to God’s involvement in creation, then the church is the *created* visible culture of the Spirit within the *created* visible creation (García-Johnson 2009: 67). Because the Spirit operates through and in the church, the Spirit works as a cultural agent. Similarly, the church – as the community of the Spirit – is also a cultural agent in the renewing of cultural life within the non-Christian culture (García-Johnson 2009: 61, 99). In this dual function of the Spirit in the church and through the church in the world, the church symbolizes the intersection between the Spirit of God and humanity. Therefore, the church as “culture of the Spirit” is the “primal location for God’s self disclosure, human disclosure, and theological reflection” (García-Johnson 2009: 67).

García-Jonson’s well-articulated practical pneumatology goes to great lengths in affirming the divine Spirit’s authorship of the church, and he credits the Spirit with making revelation, community, beauty, and empowerment concrete realities (García-Johnson 2009: 99). But there is tension in his work between pneumatological ecclesiology and pneumatological christology. In García-Johnson’s proposal the event of Pentecost and the cross of Christ provide the blueprint for the church’s identity and ethics. Yet the praxis which is characterized as the church, which he claims is praxis of the Spirit, is in fact Christopraxis.⁶ Of course there is a connection between the church’s identity and ethics in light of the Spirit’s empowering activity *and* Christ’s crucifixion. But what emerges is an understanding of the Spirit’s activity as derived from and subordinated to the work of Christ. It is this tension that is the crux of the matter in articulating a pneumatology that is distinctively Latina/o.

These three Latino theologians show that reflections on pneumatology touch on all aspects of the Christian faith and life. However, they also line up with traditional approaches to theology that articulate the activity of the Spirit as incomprehensible outside of the work of Christ. I will return to this issue in the last section, where I will propose that a Latina/o pneumatology needs to go beyond regurgitating traditional understandings of the Spirit as subordinate to Christ or the Father. Rather, I will begin to tease out/discern the unique ways the Spirit is found at work among Latinas/os (and other communities in the world) and from whose experiences of faith we can articulate creative pneumatological contributions.

Latina/o Pneumatology, Mariology, and Women's Experiences

For this section, I chose to discuss the proposals of Orlando Espín and Neomi DeAnda.⁷ Although not entirely explicit, Orlando Espín's proposal invites us to see a dialogical relation between Spirit and culture. On one hand, the Spirit is closely at work in the divine-human relation. On the other hand, the exchange between the divine and the human is culturally bound.⁸ The Spirit is the originator of the "intuitions," insights, and glimpses of the divine (think revelation) to which Latina/os attest, but culture is the medium through which these *faith-full* intuitions find their expression (Espín 1995).⁹ It is the divine Spirit that inspires, suggests, and guides the *faith-full* toward perceiving the divine disclosure.

It is with that in mind that Espín introduces the role of the devotion to the Lady of Guadalupe as a cultural expression of devotion to the Holy Spirit.¹⁰ According to him, the devotion to Guadalupe is one set of *cultural* expressions among many by which believers intuit the divine presence among them. Guadalupe, then, is a culturally legitimate form by which Latina/o devotees express "their collective and individual faith experiences and encounters with the divine" (Medina 2010). More emphatically, the ways in which Latinas/os express their faith and interact with the divine via devotion to Guadalupe resonate with the ways in which Christian "traditional" approaches often identify the Spirit of God. Note, Espín is not saying that Guadalupe is Mary of Nazareth, and he is also not saying that she "embodies" (is synonymous with) the Holy Spirit (Espín 2010: 24–5). Rather, he argues that Guadalupe can be understood as a Latina/o cultural symbol of the Spirit. The ways people describe, understand, and speak about Guadalupe display many of the characteristics which mainstream pneumatologies commonly associate with the Holy Spirit: she embodies comfort and compassion, she is the active and intimate presence of God, and she is (re)creative/empowering energy (Espín 1999: 138). Although Espín only provides sketchy ruminations concerning a pneumatological reading of Guadalupan devotion, his cultural insights as applied to Guadalupe offer a breadth of potential Latina/o (re)sources for building a distinctly Latina/o pneumatology.¹¹ By implication, he also hints that the activity of the divine Spirit follows the grammar provided by culture, which means that we can speak of the Spirit of God operative in the culturally conditioned ways with which humans interact with the divine.

Now I turn to Latina contributions for discourses about pneumatology. María Pilar Aquino (1992) reminds us that Liberation theology is rooted in the experiences of impoverished and believing people, who have experienced the power of the Spirit. Similarly, it is difficult to ignore the connections between women's deep spirituality, which I interpret as "drawing on" the Spirit, and their "moral agency," as articulated by Ada María Isasí Díaz (1993). Such a sense of "moral agency" coincides with Elizabeth Conde-Frazier's affirmation that "Conscientization is the work of the Holy Spirit leading one to the truth of one's situation and thus to an understanding of one's call or to action in that situation." These brief samples show that, for Latinas, the Spirit is central in empowering people "so that agency,

speech and political action become a part of their daily experiences" (Conde-Frazier 2004: 45) of divine pneumatic activity.

Neomi De Anda (2011) deals more substantively with pneumatology, but as with the aforementioned scholars, one must tease out the pneumatological content from her work. Just like Espín, De Anda touches on several issues related to Mariology, which I can only discuss here briefly. I chose her work, however, because the subject matter of her dissertation provides a rich array of images fruitful for pneumatological reflection. I am aware that De Anda does not make the connections I make. In fact, some aspects that I attribute to the Spirit she would ascribe to Mary. She does acknowledge, however, that "further explorations for pneumatology" could come from her study of the work of María Anna Águeda de San Ignacio (De Anda 2011: 83), and her depiction of Mary as *La Señora de la Leche* in her *Las Marabillas Selladas con El Sello del Divino Amor*. It is this aspect of De Anda's reflection on the work of María Anna that I wish to briefly explore.¹²

According to De Anda (2011: 86), the central theme of María Anna's theology is the union with God that takes place through the knowledge of God revealed through Mary's breast milk. The interconnectedness of the Triune God and Mary in this treatise uncovers a more fluid understanding of the divine which corresponds to what De Anda (2011: 16) calls "gendering images" of the *imago Dei*. In María Anna's work, claims De Anda (2011: 72), relationship conditions her understanding of *imago Dei* and *imago Christi*: Mary reflects the Trinity but not by herself, always in relation to the Trinity. And Mary is the instrument that carried, gave birth, and with her breast milk nourished and sustained the savior (De Anda 2011: 62). Through his relationship with her, Jesus learned to be *imago Christi* (De Anda 2011: 86).¹³ Her breast milk is also the path through which humanity comes to know God and be in union with God; those who choose to enter *El Camino de la Leche* can also become *imago Christi*, because they enter into the same kind of relationship as Mary and Jesus (De Anda 2011: 79, 84, 86–7). De Anda could have followed the logical implications of her explorations into an *imago Spiritus*. *El Camino de la Leche* can be easily interpreted as the work of the Spirit creating conditions for humans to live out their being created in the *image of God* to the fullest. I want to propose that Latinas/os cannot live their divine imaging – their humanity – to the fullest without the activity of the divine Spirit. Moreover, *El Camino de la Leche* requires relationships which reveal the energizing, inspiring activity of the Spirit that brings people together in relationships, in Christ-likeness (*imago Christi*). Again, I contend that Latinas/os cannot adequately speak in theological terms of their inherited, distinct, and culturally conditioned ways of building and desiring relationships unless they recognize the activity of the Spirit within them. On these two counts, *El Camino de la Leche* can be understood pneumatologically, helping to set new parameters for perceiving divine activity among Latinas/os.

In María Anna, the symbol of Mary is fluid-flexible and takes on different connotations, which are fecund with possibilities for pneumatological perspectives.¹⁴ At one level, María de la Leche refers to the biblical Mary who gave birth to Jesus. In that sense, she is the door through which the divine entered the world and was disclosed to us. On

another level, she resembles the very person of Jesus.¹⁵ On yet another level, she is this cosmic being and *El Camino de la Leche* (“The Milky Way”) is the path by which to know God (De Anda 2011: 109–10).¹⁶ And on yet another level she is the mother of all creation, and the created work of God is the fruit/result of her pure/holy milk (De Anda 2011: 119).

In this playful flow of images of Mary, and much along the lines of Espín’s proposal on Guadalupe, we also encounter a rich series of qualities that are often attributed to the Holy Spirit. Through her milk, María Anna’s Mary is the sustainer and preserver of everything (De Anda 2011: 121). She is the Vineyard that produces milk, honey, and oil, and represents sustenance, mercy, healing, and the gift of life (De Anda 2011: 125). Admittedly, these qualities may be connected to Jesus, but I argue that these are better understood pneumatologically. María Anna confirms this interpretation when she describes the mystery of the divine as justice, healing, restoration, regeneration, and medicine, the effects of which are actualized by the Holy Spirit. Of course, all of this can also be bolstered with a deeper analyses of the antecedents/God language and images in the Hebrew Scriptures and allusions to Sophia, but which go beyond the scope of this chapter.

The connection between these images and the Holy Spirit are articulated in “A Hymn to Christ the Saviour” written by Clement of Alexandria in his *The Paedagogus* (n.d.: Book III, Chapter 12). Through these images and as I have intuited, even Jesus is understood as dependent on the Holy Spirit:

Nourished by the milk of heaven,
To our tender palates given;
Milk of wisdom from the breast
Of that bride of grace exprest;
By a dewy spirit filled
From fair Reason’s breast distilled;
Let us sucklings join to raise
With pure lips our hymns of praise.

Thinking Pneumatologically: Constructive Theological Musings

The brief exploration so far shows that while considerations of the Spirit are not absent from Latina/o theological reflections, a strict pneumatology is yet to be elaborated. In this final section, I intend to contribute preliminary offerings to this enormous task. Part of this pneumatological task is to highlight the rich and diverse aspects of Latina/o spiritualities (e.g. Cavazos-González 2010: 96; Conde-Frazier 1997: 125–45). Further exploration is greatly needed into how such understandings of Latina/o spiritualities can guide us into discerning the reality and activity of the Spirit among Latinas/os. Some Latinas/os have attempted to engage issues of pneumatology drawing on inherited traditional discourses on the Spirit or the Trinity (Pedraja 1994). Luis Pedraja

(1994: 52) is correct in writing that we “who live at the margins are also lending our own perspectives, while still incorporating some of the traditional and new approaches to understand how God is for us.” Thus, my intention here is to build on those reflections done from the margins, drawing from Latina/o theological concepts, and in this way contribute to the construction of a pneumatology that is distinctly Latina/o. Of course, the following three points I make are initial thoughts that deserve fuller, careful treatment in order to articulate a robust Latina/o pneumatology.

The need to include women’s experiences in pneumatological reflections is an aspect which the works of Espín and DeAnda already mentioned make unavoidably explicit.¹⁷ In this first point, I refer to the unique embodied ways in which women experience life: by conceiving and gestating, accompanying the sick, praying, giving birth, anointing the dying, sharing the word of hope, breast-feeding, and so on (Loya 1992: 128). De Anda’s retrieval of María Anna, in particular, provides unique connections between women’s bodies and their experiences, which can shed light on the way we can speak of the reality of the Triune God and the divine Spirit through a “gendering” of the divine.¹⁸ In this way, Latinas can be our spiritual “midwives,” they can “dar (a) luz” to the Spirit, just as the Spirit is the midwife, “dadora de luz,” of divine disclosure (Loya 1992: 128). While associated with the symbol of Mary, the image from María Anna closely resembles the image of the divine Spirit impregnated with life, creating and sustaining; the Spirit oozes with life-giving energy like a womb within which life irrupts and erupts. It is this life-force that cannot be contained and that makes it possible for the person of Jesus to enter into this world, and that brings into being all of creation. It is also the life-force of *La Leche* that engenders the intimate relationship between humans and the divine, and which is gestated in the very womb of the Triune God. Articulating our understanding of the divine informed by the actual embodied experiences of Latinas by Latinas will go a long way in helping us speak about the divine Spirit as present/active/enfleshed in the material world, and not detached or disembodied as often appears among traditional pneumatologies.

The second aspect I want to propose is the Latina/o existential notion of *convivencia* as unique lens for understanding and speaking about the Spirit. In its most basic meaning, *convivencia* points to the *act* of living and sharing life with someone(s) within the context of the larger community. For Latinas/os the notion of *convivencia* presupposes a relational ethos of *en conjunto*; it makes explicit the Latina/o human formation of living life in relationship with others in the context of *lo cotidiano*, and which encompasses all aspects of life (Medina and De Anda 2009: 185–96; Riebe-Estrella 1999: 209–16S). This relational “formation” is part of the cultural and spiritual building blocks of Latinas/os, and any Latina/o understanding of the divine Spirit is shaped by this relational characteristic.

In other words, I suggest that the act of *living with* and *sharing life* – encompassed in *convivir* – is an appropriate way to frame the activity of the Spirit among Latinas/o for at least three reasons. First, for Latinas/os *convivencia* has historically been understood within the context of *sobre-vivencia*. That is, the Latina/o capacity to coexist and live with comes with the background of overcoming incredible odds in the midst of violence, discrimination, lack of opportunities, systemic exclusion/marginalization, and so on.

Generally, Latinas/os cannot speak of *convivencia* in naïve ahistorical terms, but always within the dynamics of struggle for life. Latinas/os do encounter the Spirit in moments of happiness, joy, and satisfaction; they also more importantly acknowledge being encountered by the Spirit in the midst of suffering, pain, and hopelessness (Aquino 2000; Isasi-Díaz 1993). It is in the midst of these struggles for *sobre-vivencia* that people find the empowerment of the Spirit, *living with* them and through their spiritualities injecting new energy to continue in the struggle for life. It is in this very context that Soliván's (1998) notion of *orthopathos* helps us reimagine the Spirit at work. Second, for Latinas/os *convivencia* includes celebration, *fiesta*, not as an idealized romantic motif but tempered with the sobering awareness that fiestas are touched by violence and exclusion (Goizueta 1999a: 84–99). In other words, in the midst of Latina/o *celebración-convivencia* we find the Spirit at work – amidst the very messiness of life (Maduro 1998: 10). Even when many Latinas/os feel as though there are no reasons to celebrate or hope, they refuse to cancel celebrating life with family and friends, all the while praying to God and hoping that in the near future things will get better. We see this determination in the multiple religious-cultural celebrations of quinceañera, posadas, pilgrimages, birthdays, and so on, all of which make explicit the aspirations of the people and their obstinate refusal to give up. It is the Spirit that energizes Latinas/os toward *celebración-convivencia*. Third, *convivencia* means interconnectedness, a *nosotros* shaped by “familial” relations. For Latinas/os, rather, the way they live and express their humanity is regulated/shaped/conditioned by a grammar of relational interconnectedness. In part, this relationality is expressed in our emphasis on the extended family and community, but it is more obviously expressed in people's religious celebrations, rites, and customs, which identify the human interconnection with the divine.

Justo González (1990: 158) is right in affirming that spirituality is grounded in the Spirit. I want to add that the way Latinas live their spirituality as *convivencia* illustrates the very nature of the divine Spirit's impetus to enter into relationship with the rest of creation. It also provides us with a glimpse of the internal dynamics of a *convivencia*, which operates in the very being of the divine Triune God. As people are empowered to survive, we encounter the Spirit as one who struggles for life. Stated differently, the very struggle for life is itself a window into the divine Spirit's struggle for life in this world. As Latinas/os struggle for life, they align themselves with the work of the Spirit.

As Latinas/os are inspired to enjoy life and celebrate amidst suffering and pain, they also encounter the Spirit's life-force active in restoring relationships, healing the wounded, and giving people reasons to continue to live and imagine the possibilities of a life full of love. Indeed, only the wounded healer who “has not forgotten the pain of the wounds ... can be the greatest healer of the illnesses of society” (Elizondo 1989: 372).¹⁹ As Latinas/os are discriminated against, impoverished, and robbed of opportunities, the Spirit is also injured by those actions which run counter to divine intentions for life, equality, and love, and works to rectify what has gone wrong (Soliván 1997: 54). The Spirit groans, moans, cries, and feels the pain together with the victims of exclusion, violence, and injustice.

In these difficult contexts, it is also the Spirit that empowers people to resist both through large systematic acts of resistance and with small, day-to-day acts of subversion of/nonconformism with the status quo. I believe this is the kind of social transformation to which Villafañe alludes. It is this Spirit who invites us to celebrate life in *convivencia*; the call to *convivencia* is simultaneously a form of protest against social structures that focus on individualism at the expense of community, and an eschatological and prophetic reorientation of the world.

In the face of what some may see to be hopelessness, the Hispanic church sings. In the face of oppression, it proclaims liberty to the captives, and in the absence of medical care, it engages in healing. In the presence of the collapse of the family in our society, it welcomes dysfunctional families into community. The Hispanic church lives subconsciously and at times consciously in the eschatological hope of the not yet. It dares not forget the memory of its suffering. Furthermore, it does not allow the sufferings of the past to define the expectations of *mañana*. (Soliván 1998: 135)

It is the Spirit of God that moves us, weaves our lives together as communities. More important, the measure in which Latinas/os *convivimos* and become interconnected to one another mirrors the divine Spirit's relationship to the Triune God. The perichoretic divine dance of mutual love internal to the workings of the Trinity may also be understood from a Latino/a perspective as a way to make concrete sense of *convivencia*. The category of *convivencia* unveils for us not only the divine Spirit at work among us, but also the divine Spirit in relationship to the other persons of the Trinity. This mysterious perichoretic dynamic may thus be understood as *convivencia*; the work of the Spirit among us stems from the divine intra-Trinitarian dynamic of *living with* and *sharing* life.

I want to emphasize that *convivencia*, as I have articulated it here, is not a romantic idea in which the divine stands aloof, unspoiled, and uninvested in what happens in creation. I think this is what Soliván (1997: 55) refers to as a move away from pneumatological docetism. Instead, we see the Spirit tangibly involved and operative in the very messiness of life, despite the painful reality of human selfishness and suffering, actively opposing all aspects that run counter to the divine creative intent for life. We can thus affirm that the Spirit of God is in essence a Spirit of *convivencia*, which by *living with* us perfects the divine-creation *convivencia*.

For Latinas/o the notion of *convivencia* necessarily includes the act of accompaniment. It is the notion of *acompañamiento* that I wish to offer as the third and final Latina/o theological category for speaking pneumatologically. As can be expected by Latinas/os, the semantic range of *convivencia* borders-connects with *acompañamiento*. *Acompañamiento* received its most systematic treatment in the work of Roberto Goizueta (1999). He showed us the corresponding dialogical relation between Latinas/os accompanying Jesus and Jesus' accompaniment of Latinas/os; Latinas/os accompany Jesus precisely because he accompanied them first. I want to suggest, however, that Goizueta's notion of *acompañamiento* needs to be amplified to include a pneumatological

perspective. My intention is to deal with the ways in which the Spirit can be seen as prominent without resorting to traditional perspectives that subordinate the work of the Spirit to that of Jesus.

The experiential notion of *acompañamiento* is crucial in highlighting the role of both human and Spirit's agency of *walking with*, alongside specific concrete people in their concrete lives. Humanly speaking, accompaniment describes the act of walking with the poor and placing oneself where the poor are by assuming the ethico-political consequences of such a life and by accompanying each other in a mutual struggle for survival (García-Johnson 2009: 113). Here *convivencia* is a prerequisite of *acompañamiento*. As Goizueta's (1999b: 198) invitation makes explicit, *acompañamiento* implies the very act of *living in* the areas where people live, in the inner-city ghettos and barrios. For him, to preferentially opt for the poor means to accompany them. To be a human being is to be in relationship with others, in *convivencia*, and to be in relationship with others means to *walk with* them; it is to be *acompañado* and it means to *acompañar* another (Goizueta 1999b: 205). As Latinas/os walk with each other, with the poor, they also *walk with Jesus* (Goizueta 1999b: 211).

A pneumatology of *acompañamiento* necessarily emphasizes that the human dimension of *acompañamiento* is possible precisely because of the agency work of the Spirit. On one level, *acompañamiento* refers to the very act of walking with each other in the midst of contexts of discrimination. *Acompañamiento* describes the inspiring, energizing, and empowering activity of the Spirit as Latinas/os find the strength to *acompañar* each other in the midst of incredible difficulties and learn to *convivir*. At another level, *acompañamiento* points to the economic activity of the Spirit from creation to resurrection, to the birth of the church and sustaining of creation. A methodological inversion occurs; the Spirit activity encompasses all of creation history and precedes and proceeds the life and ministry of Jesus. According to Steven Bevans, within a missionary perspective of the Spirit, "Jesus' mission ... [was] to align himself with the Spirit's work, and thus make historically concrete and visible what God had been doing through the Spirit since the creation of the world" (Bevans 1998: 103). We encounter, then, at least three aspects of the divine Spirit's accompaniment. First, from the beginning the accompanying role of the Spirit is to sustain creation, creating the conditions for life to exist and for the possibilities of the divine-creation encounter to occur. It is at this level that we need to inquire in what ways the Spirit is at work in all of creation. This query should launch us into some kind of ecological concern as well. Second, the historical involvement of the Spirit in creation made the historical person of Jesus a real possibility. The activity of the Spirit did not begin with the Jesus event. The Spirit's accompaniment of Jesus did not begin at the moment of his ministry; rather, the Spirit was involved right at the moment of conception, growth, and subsequent anointing of Jesus. In fact, it was because of the Spirit that Jesus was able to carry out his ministry and perform miracles. And after Jesus was killed, it was the Spirit that raised him from the dead. We can safely affirm that the entire Jesus event was first and foremost a pneumatological event. Third, the same Spirit that accompanied Jesus has been given to us. One could say that the Spirit has been given to us as Christians with the purpose of completing what Jesus began, but more importantly,

it has been given to us with the goal of accompanying us just as the Spirit accompanied Jesus. The actualization of such accompaniment by the Spirit is what makes it possible for humans to encounter the divine.

It is in this sense that the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ as it pushes/empowers us to follow the example of Christ. This is what García-Johnson points to as Christoformity. But as we follow *imago Christi* the Spirit places us into relationship with the divine God in order that we may live our *imago Dei* to the fullest (Soliván 1997: 143). For those who, because of discrimination, abuse, exploitation, and marginalization, have lost their humanity, relationship with God implies being empowered by the Spirit to reclaim it. In this sense, the empowerment of the Spirit reaches all aspects of human-created existence (Comblin 1989; Sobrino 1988; Casaldáliga and Vigil 1993; Ruano 2011). It is the Spirit that tills the *soil* of human existence. Thus the activity of the Spirit is not only to fulfill Jesus' work, but to complete the divine Triune God's original created intent to be in communion with humanity and the rest of creation.

In light of this, the event of Pentecost is yet another glimpse-expression of accompaniment; the Spirit's empowerment on Pentecost is another extension of the Spirit's act of accompaniment. The Spirit empowers us so that we can accompany each other and an-*other*. Pentecost symbolizes the miracle of divine inclusion and resistance of the Babel tendency to homogenize. Most important, Pentecost is the celebration of plurality in humanity, which finds its inspiration and meaning in the plurality in divinity, the very being of God. It is toward this divine, perichoretic, intraTrinitarian interpenetration that the Spirit is guiding us, which we understand, however imperfectly, as interculturality. For all intents and purposes, this is a pneumatological interculturality, a call to be for the other who is not us in the power of the Spirit, just as the Spirit among us and in the Person of Jesus make explicit the God for us.

Looking Forward to a More Systematic Latina/o Pneumatology

In the complex intersection of cultural traditions and expressions of faith, the notions of *convivencia* and *acompañamiento* provide for the beginnings of a theological frame that is distinctly Latina/o. By the use of these cultural notions and the unique lived circumstances by which Latinas/os give concreteness to these notions, we are challenged to reconceptualize our understanding of the Spirit. Moreover, because the Spirit's activity in the world embodies the divine's act of immersion in the world, I ask, can we not see this as yet another form of divine kenotic activity, by which the divine does not seek to take power but to divest God-self of power by empowering us? This is a deeper sense of kenosis. It goes beyond mere identification of the divine with creation, allowing an understanding of the divine as directly impacted by engaging human-created existence. Understood in this way, the Latina/o understanding of *convivencia* and *acompañamiento* allows us to see the Spirit beyond christological frames and more like a constitutive person of the divine Triune God, without whom the Trinity would not be a trinity.

Latina/o experiences help us envision/imagine the simultaneous interwoven nature of *convivencia* and *acompañamiento* as constitutive of the very essence of the Triune God. *Convivencia* puts a concrete content to the notion of *perichoretic interpenetration*, and *acompañamiento* helps us see how *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*. *Acompañamiento* helps us understand the Spirit as constitutive part of the Trinity, characterized by gestures of divine accompaniment, mutual support, and correspondence. There is much more to be done, but I hope these musings help show the ever elusive, irreducible self-disclosure of the divine by the Spirit in a new light. The mystery remains, but Latinas/os notions of *acompañamiento* and *convivencia* appropriately enrich inherited categories of the Spirit, precisely because of the inherent enormity of the divine mystery.

Notes

- 1 Some of the same themes and issues Villafañe raises here are repeated in his more recent *Introducción al Pentecostalismo* (2012).
- 2 In the term “fourfold gospel” many Pentecostal traditions affirm the role of Christ as Savior, Healer, Baptizer (with the Holy Spirit), and Coming King. These four correspond to crucial theological moments in the salvific saga. See Villafañe (1993: 121).
- 3 This is evident both in his articulation of the fourfold gospel and in his “Spirit-christology” as articulated in relations to the questions of missions. See Villafañe (1993: Apéndice A).
- 4 According to Soliván, *orthopathos* draws upon the kenotic christology of such early fathers as Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, and Didymus the Blind, who stressed the importance of God’s pathos as the fullest expression of his divinity (Soliván 1998: 61, 79).
- 5 García Rivera’s triadic sign approach corresponds to three key categories: the uncreated invisible, the created invisible, and the created visible. For García-Johnson, these categories correspond to the intersection between the Spirit and humanity. Thus, the uncreated invisible is the Holy Spirit, the created visible corresponds to humanity, and the created invisible corresponds to the place/space where the encounter between the Spirit and humanity takes place and which gives finds its concrete expression in the church (García-Johnson 2009: 65–7).
- 6 As he makes clear, the pattern of what the church really is stems from the event of Pentecost, insofar as it provides the conditions within which diversity and plurivocity become part of its identity. In the same way, the praxis of the church must be Christopraxis – which is the preferred mode of revelation-in-action for a Latina/o theology of the Spirit – by which the church is empowered by the Spirit to live in conformity to the crucified Christ, i.e., Cruciformity, which is the visible side of the Pentecost experience (García-Johnson 2009: 71, 86, 99).
- 7 I want to emphasize that while my discussion on Espín and DeAnda touches on issues related to Mariology, it would be a gross misrepresentation if I dismissed their reflections as merely conflating the symbol of Mary with the Holy Spirit. I want to suggest that their proposal allows for sophisticated and deeper pneumatological insights.
- 8 For a fuller analysis of Espín’s pneumatology see Medina (2010).
- 9 Again, for Espín there is a marked difference between the divine disclosure (in the form of intuitions) and the perception and expression of those intuitions by human beings: these two are not synonymous. Human cultural expressions are the means through which the church attests to its understanding of the divine disclosure, and the Spirit is activity involved in the process.

- 10 Espín's controversial proposal comes in the form of inviting-challenging us to view the US Latina/o devotion to Guadalupe as an indigenous cultural expression of devotion to the Holy Spirit, and not devotion dedicated to Mary of Nazareth. For further development see Espín (1999: 137–41, 2004). Other Catholic scholars have attempted to draw on Mary to speak about the Holy Spirit. For example, Leonardo Boff's work on the Trinity draws on Mary and connects her to the Holy Spirit in a way that resembles closely a divine quaternity (Boff, 1988; see also Boff 1980). Moreover, other Latinas/os have also proposed Mary as a possible hermeneutical key for the development of Latina/o pneumatology. See García (1992: 107–32). This I find most peculiar, given the almost non-existent treatments of the Spirit among Latina/o Catholics. Nevertheless, the exclusive connection between Guadalupe and the Holy Spirit is unique to Espín. This is an important distinction to make in order to understand his attention to Guadalupe, given that, for him, there are at least four types of Marian devotion whereby Guadalupan devotion is distinct from other forms of Marian devotions. See Espín (2010).
- 11 As Espín affirms, mature Latinas would claim that in Guadalupe they encounter the God-who-is-for-us as mother, as wisdom and understanding. Put briefly, Latinas experience *grace* in and through the *Virgen* of Guadalupe (Espín 1999: 139). These kinds of connections, I would argue, can prove fruitful in exploring the pneumatological dimensions in the devotion to the Lady of Guadalupe.
- 12 Many of the images that I highlight are taken from the section of María Anna's work included in De Anda's dissertation, so I am aware that De Anda's theological eye, however implicit, shapes the pneumatological conclusions at which I arrive.
- 13 *Imago Christi* is not something that Jesus carries inherently, but something that he learns/becomes.
- 14 There are enormous resemblances to medieval notions of Mary as Daughter of the Father, Mother of the Son, and Spouse-Wife of the Spirit. Here she is also sister of Jesus, and Jesus is also her son. See De Anda (2011: 112, 114).
- 15 Multiple are the ways in which Mary as depicted here parallels similar descriptions of Jesus in the New Testament. For example, she is the one who images God in an almost kenotic fashion (Philippians 2:5–11), who removes the veil by unveiling/revealing the divine (1 Timothy 3:16), and she is the one created before the world, as the Word is described in John 1:1.
- 16 I have intentionally translated *El Camino de la Leche* as "Milky Way," because in this section it does convey such cosmic connotations other than the spiritual path laid out for believers to follow.
- 17 I do not refer merely to how often theologians ascribe to the Spirit female characteristics, and because of that many see closer connections between Mary and the Spirit: gentleness, compassion, graciousness, and so on.
- 18 Here I follow De Anda's notion of gendering, by which an "opening up"/broadening of traditional male images of God, humanity, the *imago Dei*, and the divine-human relation is intended. Gendering, then, challenges historical dualist/dichotomous understandings. See De Anda (2011: ix, 9, 16, 64, 96).
- 19 I am aware that Elizondo gives the notion of "wounded healer" christological overtones. My point here is to signal the complex pneumatological content even in Jesus' suffering as the Spirit empowered him to carry his mission, and that in that way, even the Spirit experiences the woundedness of the human Jesus.

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CHAPTER 10

Catholic Ecclesiology

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If ecclesiology is a sustained and systematic reflection on the nature of the church as presented by the tradition, US Latino/a theologians have done little in this area to date. And the reasons are twofold. First of all, our preoccupation with other issues addressing the US Latino/a community, such as economic marginalization and cultural, gender, and religious discrimination, has drawn us to focus on those most pressing problems for the Latino/a community. Of equal importance is that faithfulness to the methodology of US Latino/a theology does not allow US Latino/a theologians to adopt such an approach to the development of a Latino/a theology of church.

In general, ecclesiology in the West has focused its reflections by zeroing in on those elements which tradition has identified as fundamental to the nature of church. Often this has meant reflecting on the dominant scriptural images of church, such as People of God, Body of Christ, and Creation of the Spirit, to see how it is that these can be applied to a given community of believers. This is the approach of Hans Küng in his groundbreaking post-Vatican II work *The Church*. Such an approach to ecclesiology often includes reflection on hierarchy (ministerial priesthood and Petrine primacy) and the four “marks” of the church (one, holy, catholic, and apostolic).

In taking this approach, Western ecclesiology in general has adopted a method of “applied theology,” that is, applying to a given community the results of the reflection of a community before it, usually without identifying the specific socio-historical context of that earlier community. By omitting recognition of that earlier community’s context, the resulting ecclesiology pretends to universalism, that is, presents itself as valid for all ecclesial communities without regard to their socio-historical specificity. When such universalistic reflections arise from a community which has established

itself as dominant either through its comparative size or by the authority it wields, this ecclesiology easily is itself identified as normative and often is identified as *the* Catholic tradition.

As is obvious from the other chapters in this volume, US Latino/a theologians reject this methodology of “applied theology.” Rather, our ecclesiological reflections, as initial as they may be, begin with the concrete historical experiences of church by US Latino/as and, as we shall see, how the US Latino/a Catholic community has named its experience of being a community of faith. We attempt to identify those elements which appear to critically shape those experiences and try to tease out their historical origin as well as how they function in the current context. The result is a growing framework of reflection which outlines a specifically US Latino/a Catholic ecclesiology.

This chapter is an attempt to put into practice this US Latino/a theological method as it applies to a theology of church. I will begin by acknowledging the self-identification as church which has come out of the lived experience of US Latino/a Catholics. I will then explore the historical and religious vectors out of which this self-identification has arisen so as to sketch out its particular content, always recognizing that such self-understanding by a living community is not fixed but changes as its experience changes. Finally, I will suggest what might be fruitful directions for further theological reflection to sketch out more fully what might be a US Latino/a Catholic ecclesiology.

Beyond the scope of this current chapter is the critical second-moment reflection which offers validity to a specific community’s ecclesiological reflection as truly catholic. This second moment puts this community’s reflection into conversation with the reflections of other Catholic communities in a dialogue which is meant to challenge the US Latino/a understanding of church and to stretch the understanding of other communities. In this crucible of dialogue, the ecclesiologies which are identified as “tradition” are shown to be shaped by the concrete circumstances of the communities in which they were birthed and thus are relativized in their claim to normativity. At the same time they act as a check on the understanding of church being developed in the US Latino/a communities and add to their enrichment.

***Pueblo*: Foundational Self-Identification as Church**

As I have developed in an earlier article (Riebe-Estrella 1999), the *Encuentro* process of the 1970s was critical to the US Latino/a community’s self-understanding as church. The first *Encuentro* in 1972 was a mostly top-down affair. It consisted of a gathering of mostly self-selected Latino leaders reflecting on the situation of the US Latino/a Catholic community’s place within the larger US Catholic Church. Its style was predominately confrontational, issuing in some seventy-eight conclusions and demands placed at the doorstep of the US bishops. This confrontational style resulted in a polarization between the Latino/a and non-Latino/a communities in a number of dioceses,

which only served to frustrate the implementation of the conclusions. The planning group for the *Segundo Encuentro*, held in 1977, used a radically different process which represented far less official church leadership and emphasized the participation of grassroots Catholic Latino/as. Over 100,000 people were consulted in the planning stage. The theme which emerged for this second *Encuentro* was *Pueblo de Dios en Marcha*. This centrality of *pueblo* as the foundational starting point of US Latino/a Catholic community's self-understanding as church was ratified in the *Third Encuentro*'s pastoral guidelines, each of which begins with the phrase "*Nosotros, como pueblo hispano*" (Sandoval 1994).

This ecclesial sense of self as *pueblo* reflects the sociocentric or organic nature of Latino/a culture. Founded on the understanding of the self not as an autonomous individual, but rather as rooted in a primary group (usually family), sociocentric cultures assert the fundamentally communal nature of human identity. An organic culture sees human society as a network of relationships into which one is born and which is exercised to meet life's ordinary needs and challenges. It is a world in which who you know counts for far more than what you know. All the relationships in this network use family as their paradigm, bringing new members into the network through marriage, friendship, and, in the case of Latino/as, through *compadrazgo*. Who I am as a person is defined by my place within this network, which spreads out from my role as a member of the family in which my fundamental identity is to be found (Shweder and Bourne 1984).

While this community focus of sociocentric cultures reinforces the US Latino/a Catholic sense of church as community under the title of *pueblo*, it also brings with it the internal emphasis typical of group cultures. That is, since relationships map the world of organic cultures, people's attention is appropriately focused inward toward the group and its betterment. This shows clearly in the fact that the conclusions of all three *Encuentros* focus on addressing the needs of the Latino/a community. Even the four specific dimensions of the *National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry* see Latino/as as the objects of these pastoral initiatives. As I have attempted to show elsewhere, there is a notable lack of emphasis in the US Latino/a community's ecclesial identification of itself as *pueblo* on its role in the larger context of the US Catholic church and the challenges that church faces (Riebe-Estrella 1999). The very fact that in Spanish *pueblo* means both "people" and "town" is suggestive of an ecclesial worldview which is circumscribed by its own dynamics and concerns.

De Dios en Marcha: An Opening beyond Self

The *Second Encuentro*'s identification of the ecclesial reality of the US Latino/a community as *pueblo* strategically modifies this image to be *Pueblo de Dios en Marcha*. That is, this self-understanding particularizes US Latino/a's peoplehood. We are not *cualquier pueblo*, but a *pueblo* which belongs to God. The acknowledgment of this relationship has two significant implications. First of all, it is an affirmation that this

ecclesial community sees itself as belonging to God in the sense of having been called into existence by God. That is, as church, we are a response to God's initiative. This assertion was experienced in both the *Second* and *Third Encuentros* as a source of strength or motivation for taking on the commitments that issued in the *National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry*. As such it provides the possibility, though still initial, for the US Latino/a ecclesial community to break the cycle of internal focus so characteristic of sociocentric societies. That is, in the *Encuentros* the US Latino/a church began to own its responsibility to be an active agent for God's Reign in larger US society and church (National Conference of Catholic Bishops 1987: §17).

Secondly, while every truly ecclesial community is the result of God's initiative, that initiative with Latino/as took place in quite particular socio-historical circumstances. We were formed into church amidst the barbarism of the Spanish *conquista* and, as US Latino/as, a second time in our marginalization and oppression by the German/Irish church of the United States. Those traumatic circumstances have informed what might be called the ethos of our ecclesial identity.

Our ancestors, particularly in Mesoamerica, were forced to abandon their indigenous religious world in favor of the pre-Tridentine Catholicism of sixteenth-century Spain. This religious rape was accompanied by the destruction of the indigenous social structure, and, through servitude and imported diseases, the very physical presence of pre-Columbian peoples in the Americas was threatened as the population was reduced by the millions. As their religious world was destroyed, the indigenous peoples adopted from Catholicism an attachment to those images which most clearly reflected how the sacred might function in this new world of psychological and physical disintegration, that is, who was this *Dios* who called this community into existence. It is difficult to over-emphasize the traumatic nature of the collision of these two religious and social worlds.

As is clear from work done by Orlando Espín, a primary sense of the sacred in which the community found itself reflected was that of a crucified God. While the specific image itself is predominantly that of Christ in his passion, the indigenous were not equipped with a philosophical metaphysics which allowed them to understand such concepts as the Trinity and the attendant distinction of persons in the divine (Espín 1997). In fact the very sociocentric nature of their culture favored their viewing the sacred as a group, with members of the group playing differing roles at different times. This sense of the sacred as fundamentally that of a group of manifestations of the sacred differentiated by place and function, but often interchangeable in role, was at the heart of the Mesoamerican religious imagination (Lockhart 1992).

The horrors of the *conquista*, reinforced by the marginalization and discrimination experienced by Latino/a Catholics in the *segundo mestizaje* in their encounter with the US church, set the scene for the US Latino/a ecclesial community to see itself imaged in the suffering of the divine seen in the emphasis on the *Cristos* of the passion, as well as *la Virgen dolorosa*, and the martyrs.

At the same time, one must put into play here the other image of the sacred which was used as a source of self-identification: *la Virgen de Guadalupe*. Within ten years of the apparition itself, the majority of Mesoamerican indigenous had become Christian, having,

many would argue, seen themselves mirrored in the brown virgin dressed like an Aztec princess whose state of pregnancy presaged a yet unknown future (Elizondo 2000). Guadalupe was both the banner and the cry of Hidalgo which heralded the Mexican revolution of 1810 to win freedom from Spain. In the 1960s, it was cross and Guadalupe that Cesar Chavez held up to lead the march to Sacramento, calling for justice for farmworkers.

It can be controversial to ask who was this Guadalupe in the minds of the indigenous of sixteenth-century Mexico or even of Guadalupanos of the twenty-first century. The orthodox answer is that it is Mary of Nazareth under a specific title. However, it is more likely that Guadalupe was understood as the feminine manifestation of God. Mesoamerican indigenous religion had a fascination with duality. All their “gods” were dual, that is, male and female; even their poetry was called by the dual phrase *flor y canto*. As the *Cristo* image consolidated and reflected their sense of self as suffering and oppressed, so the Guadalupe image sought to convey another aspect of this people’s experience. The Christ of the passion was the one who suffered, but he was also the one who endured. *El aguantó* – he endured the suffering and was still there at the end. In a sociocentric culture, which is constituted by relationships, the greatest evil is the rupture of those relationships which ground one’s identity. It is not accidental that the religious leaders of Jesus’ time crucified him “outside the city.” That was a statement that he was cut off from his own people. He was abandoned by his closest friends and mocked by passers-by. All this in a sociocentric society should make him and make him feel a non-person. But, in the midst of that abandonment, though others might have broken their relationships with him, he never ruptured his relationships with them. He did not lash out in anger; he did not condemn. He endured his suffering with the integrity of his relationships intact – that is, with who he was intact. And so, within this image of the suffering Christ there is the glimpse of the power to endure with integrity, to be a suffering people that is not victim but that still is in control of who they are and so of their destiny. I would suggest that it is this positive sense of self which is taken up in the Guadalupe image of the divine who cares, comforts, and accompanies. The Guadalupan characteristics of presence, caring, and protection create a space in the people’s collective psyche to acknowledge that they are not defeated by the violence and oppression of the conquest but that they retain the possibility of a future yet unknown. The God to whom this *pueblo* belongs – *el Pueblo de Dios en Marcha* – images both their suffering and their capacity to endure. It is the Guadalupe image that holds the possibility of this community’s sense of being active agents of God’s Reign. *Este pueblo* which God has created in the image of God’s own suffering (*de Dios*) *está en marcha*, beginning to sense its capacity to develop its own destiny. It is the two images together (the suffering God and Guadalupe) which capture the ecclesial self-identity of the indigenous and then the US Latino/a Catholic community. While the *Second Encuentro* highlighted the needs of the US Latino/a church and so presented the results suffered because of discrimination and marginalization, the tone of the *Third Encuentro*, particularly as phrased in the *National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry*, attempted to establish a path forward on the part of a church not victimized and thus absorbed by its own suffering.

Prophetic Voices

The Document on the Process of the III Encuentro Nacional Hispano de Pastoral (Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 1986), in the section on “A Theological Pastoral Reflection” developed after the *Third Encuentro* by a group of Hispanic pastoral ministers and of bishops, attempts to find the image of church which can further the opening provided by *Pueblo de Dios en Marcha*. The reflection, for one of the first times in the documents of the *Encuentros*, mentions the risen Lord as sensed in US Latino/a community’s commitment beyond itself. It is the risen Lord who is revealed in the hope for a new social order and a new way of being church (*pastoral de conjunto*). This image, however, remains undeveloped both in *The Document* and in the *National Pastoral Plan*. The reflection then moves to two additional descriptions of the US Latino/a ecclesial community: “Pilgrim Church” and “Prophetic Church.” Both are seen to embody the need to move beyond a church of need into a church of action, but they are not mined in the *Encuentro* documents for their long-range implications for the community’s self-understanding – a pressing task that needs to be undertaken.

At a Junction

The ecclesiology which arises out of the lived experience of the US Latino/a community and with which it self-identifies is, then, at a junction in its development. Born out of suffering but with an openness to move beyond, the community finds itself with two foci. The still predominant one is to work to remedy the ills from which it has suffered, addressing the needs of constituent groups within the community, while noting the connection between that work and the larger reality of the Reign of God. The second is to focus on its role as an agent of transformation and a voice for change within the larger US Catholic Church and society. This simultaneous presence of two foci in the US Latino/a Catholic community is reflective of its current socio-historical reality. On the one hand it is a community growing rapidly through the immigration of the poor and of victims of violence and drug-trafficking in Mexico and Central America. It is a youthful community with a median age under twenty-five, but one lacking in opportunities for quality education. One third of the community speaks Spanish as their dominant language and bears the discrimination of being outsiders in the US Catholic church and society. At least one quarter of the community lives below the national poverty level. On the other hand, 75 percent live above the poverty level and are the largest newly discovered market for American business. They number close to half of the US Catholic population and are the majority of Catholic youth. The number of Latino/a-owned businesses is growing rapidly. They are not predominately foreigners in US society; fully two thirds of Latino/as living in the United States were born there.

The ecclesiological question before the US Latino/a Catholic community is fundamentally this: what kind of church will it become? If it centers on the needs of the impoverished and marginalized within its ranks and so is faithful to its understanding

as reflective of a suffering God, it risks being irrelevant for those Latino/a Catholic who are effectively acculturating into US society and whose vision is focused on a better future and less on a marginalized past. Will it be a church of immigrants, as is so often the case today, where models for effective pastoral ministry to second- and third-generation Latino/as have been developed only sporadically at best? If, on the other hand, it allows itself to be molded by the aspirations of its more affluent majority, can it keep its identity with the poor and the marginalized a vital part of its self-understanding, or will its impoverished members simply be recipients of the charity of those better off?

How does a church community remain faithful to its history of suffering and yet, at the same time, embrace the hope for a better future? One might argue that the church in the West failed to keep that balance and the poor were the losers. In the case of the US Latino/a Catholic community, this junction and the choices it offers make for a fertile field of further ecclesiological reflection, for the stakes are high and the consequences crucial.

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CHAPTER 11

Protestant Ecclesiology

Edwin David Aponte

For some people in the United States the topic of Latino/a Protestant ecclesiology might seem strange to even discuss, not because ecclesiology is an unimportant subject (indeed the opposite is true), nor because of the many challenges of defining what is meant by ecclesiology, especially in an age that has been described as postmodern, post-colonial, post-Christian, and post-denominational (Fox 1997; Segovia 2000; Kwok 2005; Villafaña 2006; Rivera 2007; Westhelle 2010; Tyra 2013; Granberg-Michaelson 2013). Indeed there is even some question within some expressions of self-identified progressive and emergent Christianity whether or not the church is even a necessity (Borg 2003; McLaren 2004). Rather, for some the surprise and oddity about focusing on Latino/a ecclesiology is that there is a distinct reality that can be called Latino/a Protestantism. Within the context of an increasingly pluralistic society, which simultaneously is still very religious and spiritual, when religious orientation is considered at all in public discourse many widely held perceptions are that the peoples who are called Latinos/as are either entirely Roman Catholic or at least overwhelmingly so. But in fact, there is great religious diversity in the US Latino/a population. While there are several studies with varying results, typically it is held that the Latino/a population is approximately 60–70 percent Catholic, but even within this majority group there is a great deal of diversity and difference when compared to non-Latino/a understandings of what it means to be Catholic (Pew Hispanic Center 2007; Espinosa, Elizondo, and Miranda 2003; Institute for Latino Studies 2003; Navarro-Rivera, Kosmin, and Keysar 2009). But the situation is even more complicated, as Michelle Gonzalez calls attention to the “intrinsic Catholicism of the Hispanic community” as a whole but also observes “Asserting the Roman Catholic heritage of the Latina people is not the same as claiming that all Latinas are Roman Catholic” (Gonzalez 2009: 4). Historian David Traverso

Galarza, who describes himself as “a third generation Hispanic *evangélico*,” is one of those who argues that the 70 percent Catholic figure may be too high an estimate of the religious affiliation of Latinos/as (Traverso Garlaza 2006: 191, 193). The next largest Latino/a religious group, comprising about 20–30 percent of those surveyed, are “born again” (referring to the gospel of John 3:7), “believers’ church,” or other expressions of Protestantism that is inclusive of historic Mainline, non-aligned, and Pentecostals and Charismatics (Martínez 2006a). Even within this grouping there is a great deal of overlap and blurring of boundaries. Moreover, while sociologists and others may group Latino/a Protestants together for statistical purposes, there are in fact self-recognized differences and divisions among religious traditions (Sánchez Walsh 2003: 4–7; Wacker 2001: 75–6). Despite inexact numbers, it is clear that part of the rich religious and spiritual Latino/a diversity is the great variety of Latino/a Protestants. And within Latino/a Protestantism in the United States there are distinct understandings of ecclesiology.

But before even discussing those Latino/a Protestant concepts of ecclesiology, it is prudent to first be clear as to what is meant by ecclesiology. Ecclesiology is both easily defined and at the same time a complex notion. The word itself can be traced back to the Greek *ekklesia*, which means an assembly of people, and more specifically an assembly of citizens. The translators of the Septuagint (an ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, often referred to by the abbreviation LXX) most often used *ekklesia* to translate the Hebrew word *qahal* “a called assembly,” “congregation,” or “company.” Examples of use of *ekklesia* in the Septuagint (LXX) include a gathering of people (1 Samuel 17:47 [LXX I Kings 17:47]); an assembly of “evil-doers” (Psalm 26:5 [LXX 25:5]); and the “*ekklesia* of the Lord” as the covenantal assembly of Israel (Deuteronomy 4:10). As a Greek term that originally referred to a gathering of citizens called to a public assembly, *ekklesia* in the Hellenistic Jewish communities, as reflected in the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible, took on derived meanings of a group of people, even an assembly of evildoers, but most often in reference to the sacred called assembly of Israelites, the covenant people (Nickoloff 2007). For many of the early Jewish and later Gentile followers of Jesus whose Bible was the Septuagint or some other Greek translation, it is not surprising that they would adopt the usage of Greek-speaking Jews, which resulted in *ekklesia* being appropriated by the early Christians. The word is used over a hundred times in the New Testament as referring to the assembly of believers in Jesus as the Christ, later called Christians, those who have been called out and assembled together in Christ.

With this background in mind, ecclesiology, then, usually is understood as the branch of Christian theology that focuses on the church and addresses the nature, mission, structure, and practices of the Christian church as a community of called believers understood in multiple ways, globally, historically, eschatologically (in the sense of encompassing the church both living and dead), and in local gatherings. However, ecclesiology can encompass much more than just the study of the church. As Jeanette Rodríguez observes, “The church as a social/cultural reality has a task of forming bonds among people. How a person is brought into a community, how they are

understood in a community, and how they understand their community is fostered through images and models" (Rodríguez 2006: 44). Given this, an understanding of church ecclesiology ought to take into account social, cultural, and communal dimensions as well as theological. Moreover, as Mark Lau Branson and Juan Martínez helpfully note "A community can be composed of persons from one culture or even several cultures. A community is usually located in the midst of several societies" (Branson and Martínez 2011: 80). Therefore, a fuller understanding of ecclesiology also encompasses this dimension of peoples in community in their daily lives together as Christian within the contexts of larger societies. This prominence of the daily life experiences and struggles, and of the formal and popular theologizing that emerges out that, is a major characteristic of Latino/a theologies across ecclesiastical traditions (Espín and Díaz 1999; Isasi-Díaz 2004; Martell-Otero 2013a). This focal point is often referred to as *lo cotidiano*, and it is from the everyday experiences that grassroots notions of ecclesiology emerge, as Gilberto Cavazos-González notes: "For Latin@ theologians, culture, social location, life and faith experiences are important components of how we theologize" (Cavazos-González 2009). As theologian Dwight Hopkins notes, that which is sacred is experienced through human culture (Hopkins 2005: 78). Certainly it is the experience of Latinos/as that what is holy and sacred is revealed and experienced in everyday culture and thereby impacts notions concerning the nature and work of the church.

Beyond the general understanding of ecclesiology considered so far, the particulars of what is meant by "church" can vary widely in that there are many groups that profess to be church, sometimes with competing claims. Even when they are drawing on the same resources there can be widespread divergences of opinion, as seen in divisions between Eastern and Western traditions, and in the Western Church between Catholic and Protestant, and then all the expressions of Protestantism. Nevertheless, despite such variety, theologian Luis Pedraja identifies common characteristics across church traditions, summarizing that "ecclesiology understands the church in terms of its catholicity (universality), apostolicity, oneness (unity), and holiness. Whether we see ourselves as Catholic or Protestant, these defining marks are central to understanding the church as a whole" (Pedraja 2003: 179). Pedraja's summary of course draws on the formulation of the church found in the Nicene Creed of 381 CE as "one holy, catholic, and apostolic church," and on the basis that while God is active in all of humanity, God is active in a special way in the church for the work of reconciliation.

Certainly individual traditions of Christianity may claim that they are worldwide in their identity and reach (universality) while simultaneously excluding others who self-identify as Christian and make the same type of universal claim. At the same time, other Christian groups claim to have a direct connection to the foundational teachings and persons of the apostles, or proclaim that their group is the center of Christian unity and holiness, while simultaneously excluding others. And there can be nuances of understanding of meaning of these aforementioned traits of the church. Reflecting the perspective of Pentecostal/Charismatic traditions, often referred to as the fastest-growing streams in Christianity in the twentieth and early twenty-first century, theologian Amos

Young states, "Pentecostals certainly would affirm the unity of the church. They would deny, however, that any one episcopate constitutes that unity. ... Because ecclesial unity is experienced in the fellowship of those who confess Jesus as Lord by the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 12:3), such unity is eschatological but also supremely particularistic, perhaps even sacramental" (Young 2005: 136).

As a result it can be said also that all these characteristics of the Christian church (universality, apostolicity, unity, and holiness), while affirmed by many, also might be more discernible in the breach rather than in the practice, given the past of Christianity and the historic divisions that remain, to say nothing of new separations that seem to emerge daily in the present. So, even when there is a claim of a particular ecclesiastical trait, it is not certain that all will share the same understanding of the specific characteristic that Pedraja identifies.

Therefore, while these four historic general characteristics of the church are helpful in defining the church, they only go so far. Cheryl M. Peterson's query is a helpful one in defining ecclesiology and what the church is, by asking a primary theological question: "Who is the Church?" This is a question of identity that is also connected to issues of history and context (Peterson 2013). Peterson reminds us that the questions of who is the church and what the church does formally and in everyday practices are critical for ecclesiology, but the answers may be very different from each other. Peterson further claims that "the church finds its identity in the activity of the Holy Spirit. This makes the starting point for ecclesiology the Triune God and what God is doing, rather than the church and what its members do" (Peterson 2013: 6). In this context the focus is on religious and spiritual identity with what God is doing in the world through the Holy Spirit. But again, the situation is much more complicated, in that in the USA Latino/a peoples actually carry in both their being and doing multiple identities, including assumed and imposed racial and ethnic ones. The racial/ethnic labels pose a challenge in that they are not simply descriptive, nor do they necessarily shed any new light on peoples who already are multiethnic, multicultural, cross-cultural in their daily lives, and if dominant categories of the social construction of race are used, also might be identified as multiracial.

Situating Latino/a Protestant ecclesiology must also consider that some recent discussions are at some variance from what Peterson describes. Such emphases focus on the challenges facing churches: one can find a type of emphasis on doing rather than being, accompanied by a focus on what needs to be faced rather than spending too much time on introspection on identity, or trying to define ecclesiology. In other words, there is a type of ecclesiology built on activity rather than essence. For example, in some Charismatic circles the focus is not on the nature of the church, but rather on addressing "issues" that confront the contemporary church, such as racism, righteous living, right living, right doctrine, prophetic leadership, sound teaching, progressive evangelists, apostolic leaders, abusive pastors, new leaders, self-policing, cultural influence, social justice, female leaders, discipling men, world missions, multiethnicity, praise and worship, pride, supernatural power, and bridge-building with evangelicals.

Other approaches to defining ecclesiology include historical descriptions. In the case of Latino/a Protestant ecclesial history this approach often is manifested as a historical recovery effort, since Latinos/as generally have been left out of many culturally dominant accounts of the history of the church in North America. Examples of the recovery and rediscovery of the stories of the Latino/a Protestant church on the margins include Daisy Machado on Latinos/as in Texas within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the late nineteenth through mid-twentieth centuries (Machado 2003); David Maldonado on growing up as a Mexican American Methodist in a predominantly Catholic barrio of Seguin, Texas (Maldonado 2001); Paul Barton recounting the histories of Latino/a Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians in the US southwest in the 1830s–1990s (Barton 2006); the work of Juan Francisco Martínez, who traces the development of Mexican American Protestantism in the southwest by reviewing the work of Anglo American Protestant missionaries (Martínez 2006b); and Randi Jones Walker's account of Latino/a Protestant churches in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado in the nineteenth century (Walker 1991).

The preceding discussion illustrates the complexity in defining ecclesiology. From one perspective it is clear that ecclesiology focuses on Christians in their lives together and activity in the world in particular contexts. As such, an additional helpful insight into the nature of ecclesiology is found in the Protestant Reformed traditions that speak about additional distinguishing marks of the church. Specifically, John Calvin summarized part of his ecclesiology when he wrote that “Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there is not to be doubted, a church of God exists” (Calvin 1960: 1023). If this is the case, then at its best the people of God as church both locally and globally engage the Scriptures (Word of God), practice the sacraments (at the very least baptism and the Lord's Supper/Eucharist), and minister in the world, which includes accepting, encouraging, supporting, occasionally chastising, and mentoring each other in community –, in essence, loving one another and the world as church. In word and behavior, people live out what it means to be church and demonstrate in tangible ways the grace of God in the world.

With this background we can turn more specifically to the subject of Latino/a Protestant ecclesiology. As theologian Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen addressed the question of whether it is even appropriate to discuss whether or not there is such a thing as a Pentecostal ecclesiology (Kärkkäinen 2002), likewise does it even make sense to talk about a Latino/a Protestant ecclesiology given the diversity that exists among Latino/a Protestants theologically, linguistically, geographically, and generationally? The answer is yes, especially if we keep in mind the daily lived experiences (*lo cotidiano*) of Latinos/as individually and in community. Defining Latino/a Protestant ecclesiology is not without challenges, as renowned historian and theologian Justo González noted when he said that there was a lack of any explicit Latino/a Protestant ecclesiology, which he attributes to an “inherited theology in which ecclesiology plays a very secondary role” (González 1997: 80). González saw this inherited theology as including a personalized, individualistic form of Protestantism that relegated the Christian community interpretation to a

secondary position; a type of anti-establishment attitude toward a hierarchal church and its assumption of authority; a numerical growth in church membership, especially among Latino/a Pentecostals, that emphasized the gifts of the Spirit rather than any interpretive role of the wider church; and finally the marginal experiences of Latino/a Protestants in the United States (González 1997: 80–3). Nevertheless, even with this history, with the diversity among Latino/a Protestants, and with the absence of explicit historical Latino/a Protestant ecclesiology, some shared characteristics across traditions can be identified as basic characteristics of Latino/a Protestant ecclesiology that emerges from the daily experiences of the communities and their life together.

In moving toward a definition of Latino/a Protestant ecclesiology it is helpful to first get a better grasp of who are the Latino/a Protestants. *Evangélico* and *evangélica* literally mean “evangelical,” but in this context there the word signifies both “Protestant” and “Evangelical” in a broad sense, rather than a single theological and cultural stream of Protestantism as is the case with the term “evangelicalism” in the North American English-speaking context. Historically, in Anglo Protestant contexts the term “evangelical” (and its later specialized understanding as Evangelical) has many connotations, from its historical roots going back to the Protestant reformations of the sixteenth century to the present mutations of the word in both ecclesiastical and political contexts. For Latino/a and Latin American Protestants the preferred self-designation in Spanish is *evangélico/a* rather than *protestante*. As already noted, it is inaccurate to make a strict equation between North American evangelical and Latino/a *evangélico/a*. There is some breadth in what is meant by Euro-American evangelical Christianity. Sánchez Walsh states,

When scholars of evangelicalism and evangelicals alike discuss American Evangelicals, they mean Euro Americans. Specialists discuss the black church or the new Latino presence in Protestantism, but rarely are these groups included in a holistic approach to discussing what American Evangelicalism is – it is not white, though its proponents often speak of it as if it is a separate entity from churches of color. (Sánchez Walsh 2003: 157)

Latino/a *evangélicos/as* share views of Scripture, theology, preaching, and ministry as well as a common cultural concern. While some *evangélico/as* may be Evangelical, in the contemporary Anglo American Protestant sense, not all Evangelicals are *evangélico/as*.

Latino/a Protestantism cannot be understood by simply using the dominant categories in US religious ecology of liberal, progressive, conservative, mainstream or mainline, and those outside the mainline. Part of the richness of Latino/a Protestantism is that it creatively draws on many sources while seeking to be relevant to its own social, cultural, and historical contexts, which are lived out in multiple ways on the margins of the dominant society in the United States. An illustration of this is found in Juan Francisco Martínez’ observation that the Latino/a Protestant community often is described as “theologically more conservative than U.S. Protestantism at large, but also a community that does not define the relationship between faith and politics in the same way that it is commonly defined in the U.S. context.

Latino/a evangelicals/Pentecostals understand that their faith calls them to be 'conservative' on personal morality issues and 'liberal' on issues of social morality" (Martínez 2011: 25–6).

Emerging out of such an intricate context is a basic attribute of Latino/a Protestant ecclesiology: a shared experience of the presence of God in Christ in the *vida cotidiana* (daily life), which is a widely articulated aspect of Latino/a Protestant reality. This is a fundamental and profoundly held belief that God exists, is personally concerned for Latinos/as, and is involved in their daily lives. This personal God provides for their tangible and intangible needs. A relationship with God through Jesus Christ is the common central understanding of the many diverse Latino/a congregations. Even when life is difficult, Latino/a Protestants trust in the reality of a concerned personal God who is known intimately in Christ Jesus (Cardoza-Orlandi 2009). Across traditions Latino/a Protestants define religion, faith, and spirituality and live them out daily in a very christocentric way.

A second characteristic of Latino/a Protestant ecclesiology across traditions is the presence and importance of the Word, understood as God speaking through the Bible, but accompanied by a living recognition that God continues to speak to the church through the Holy Spirit. This of course includes the Word preached, but also many other manifestations of word proclaimed as a type of sacred rhetoric. In many Latino/a Protestant congregations the Bible is revered as having divine origin and is perceived as the major resource for preaching. Biblical preaching contributes to the maintenance of the community, encourages personal biblical study, and contributed to the development of Latino/a Protestant individual and communal spirituality (Jiménez 1997: 66–79; Conde-Frazier 1997: 132–3). Preaching in Latino/a Protestant contexts typically takes place during the worship service, *el culto*, and plays an important role in the life of the community. Sermons can range from fifteen minutes to over an hour. But despite the variety in sermon length, for many Latino/a Protestants preaching functions as the principal way for the congregation to receive instruction on the Bible and as a resource for *lo cotidiano*. Not only is the message important, but also preaching the Word serves as the vehicle for many to take on a major role in their communities in the formulation local theologies, actions, and ethics.

The importance of the Bible for the daily life of Latino/a Protestants is in contrast with other assertions about Latina Christianity. The importance of the Word, particularly Scripture, is pronounced in Latino/a Protestantism, as Loida Martell-Otero observes: "In contradistinction to *mujerista* claims Scripture is an important theological tool for *evangélicas*. Other authoritative texts such as *testimonios*, *coritos*, and prayers provide *evangélicas* with a self and agency" (Martell-Otero 2013b: 40). As Martell-Otero and others observe, for Latino/a Protestants the Word of God comes in multiple ways: in the Bible itself; through the Holy Spirit in the Word preached; in other types of sacred rhetoric such as *testimonios*, *coritos*, and other hymns and spiritual songs; and through prayer.

Another major trait of Latino/a Protestant ecclesiology is that it is infused with an ethos of *la familia*, the family. Latino/a Protestant congregations become a type of

extended family, a cultural dynamic of familial kinship that may include but also goes beyond actual blood relationship and is lived out in the church. Elizabeth Conde-Frazier asserts what is true in many Latino/a Protestant contexts: “For congregations shaped by the realities of immigration, the congregation is a place to remake *familia* and a sense of stability and community in one’s life. Because we are *familia*, the same gifts and limitations are reflected in the new extended *familia* of choice” (Conde-Frazier 2013: 90). Kinship in Christ is real, so that designations of *hermano* and *hermana* (brother and sister) in referring to fellow members are very common across the diversity of Latino/a Protestantism. The *compadrazgo* (co-parenthood) system of *comadres* and *compadres* is part of the life and blood of the church.

Another aspect of family in Latino/a Protestant churches, and an intentional reference to the New Testament book of Acts, is that the Latino/a Protestant church takes care to take care of its members, sometimes through love offerings for financial needs. When a member is suffering, then the whole body is suffering and needs to respond to help the suffering member of the family. This is positively lived out in many of their lives as expectations for behavioral norms are raised, and so many rise to that level and have their lives truly transformed in such churches. New members in such churches receive a new family, a new title of “brother” or “sister,” and a new life story. They have a new inheritance as a member of this family. They want to share this inheritance with their family and with others and can be quite evangelical.

Pastors also are part of this ecclesial family system and reflect the respect ascribed to those in pastoral roles. Rarely do the members refer to the pastor by her or his first name, and for some “Pastor” often is viewed in a parental way. In many settings Latina women are fully accepted in the role of pastor, whereas in others women are restricted from being pastor for theological reasons. However, even in those Latino/a Protestant contexts where there are gender restrictions, the role of the pastor’s wife seems to be a subaltern leadership role, at variance with official theology. In those churches where there are gender restrictions prohibiting women from formally serving as pastor, the male pastor’s wife nevertheless is called *la pastora*, literally “the pastor” (feminine). While certainly this is a term of respect (akin to “first lady” in African American congregations), it is also an indicator of a quasi-official role. At the very least the pastor’s wife is invested with pastoral authority by virtue of being the spouse, but in the daily life of congregations it can be much more than that. Significantly, *la pastora* is looked to to provide pastoral care to *la familia* of the congregation. Not just pastors, whether in their own right or as spouse, but more widely Latina women are an integral part of a church as family, serving as advisers, teachers, evangelists, counselors, and healers, and in other types of ministry and care, and therefore play a major role in defining Latino/a Protestant ecclesiology and shaping the spirituality of the church (Conde-Frazier 1997: 140). The active role of women in Latino/a Protestant churches, whether as pastor in their own right, as *pastora* by virtue of their role as spouse, or in some other leadership role, demonstrates the ongoing development of Latino/a Protestant ecclesiology.

Beyond *familia*, an additional characteristic of Latino/a Protestant ecclesiology is the emphasis on worship. In worship gatherings, the amount of time given to preaching

and singing shows their importance in Latino/a Protestant worship. In some contexts preaching is the focal point of worship, but certainly worship and particularly singing come in a close second in Latino/a Protestant churches. Moreover the concept of sacred *fiesta* in Latino/a Protestant worship finds an expression in the liturgical music. Central to Latino/a Protestant belief and practice is the idea that the Holy Spirit regularly moves and acts in people's lives. And it is quite common that in services there will be ecstatic singing, spontaneous prayer, speaking in tongues in Pentecostal/Charismatic settings, and long, seemingly improvised sermons.

Latino/a Protestant churches are rich in both their diversity and the unity exhibited in sacred *fiesta/culto*/worship. Each congregation draws on its specific traditions of Protestant Christianity in their worship, even while those traditions are reimagined. Latino/a Protestantism is characterized by a shared understanding of worship of God that provides a dynamic cultural space of creativity, expression, and identity. While on the margins of dominant society, Latino/a Protestants live out stories of God's intervention and companionship with a marginalized people. This creation of an alternative public space and identity sustains community life and is an active response to imposed marginalization. A major component of this Latina/o Protestant social borderland is embodied in the content and style of worship, traditionally in the use of *coritos*. As sacred rhetoric *coritos* also exhibit a profound hermeneutical power within the alternative public realm of Latino/a Protestant congregations across the United States.

Among Latino/a *evangélicos* (in the most inclusive sense of Protestant) there seems to be a shared, creative, and somewhat flexible Protestant-*evangélico*-Pentecostal-charismatic liturgical motif at work in worship as congregants give expression to the sacred, even among those congregations that clearly state that they are not Pentecostal. Across all types of Latino/a Protestant communities, that is expressed in jubilant worship with fervor, energy, celebration, music, movement, and a relational sense of community, as shouts of *aleluya* and *santo* are heard in Latino/a Protestant worship gatherings.

Latino/a Protestants share the conviction that worship is central to the mission and life of the church, which in turn becomes an ongoing resource for faith and action. Worship as prayer and praise is directed toward *Dios* (God) while simultaneously serving as specific cultural expression, and a site for theological and ethical counter-hegemonic discourse, reformation, and self-defined action in the world. As historian Daniel Ramírez recounts, the use of home-grown folk rhythms and instruments was always present from the beginning (Ramírez 2008). When congregations have live music typically there is always at least one guitar, often accompanied by other instruments, depending on the ethnic composition of the congregation, such as trumpets, saxophones, maracas, tambourines, and a gourd instrument called a *güiros*. Adding to the tapestry of sounds are various percussion instruments: drums, congas, bongos, and sometimes a *timbale*. Increasingly in this digital age pre-recorded soundtracks accompany worship, whether or not there are musicians in a particular congregation.

One of the reasons that Latino/a Protestantism, particularly in its Pentecostal and Charismatic varieties, is growing extensively is that there is something appealing about its theologies and practices of inclusion, especially in worship. In worship there is

something culturally accessible for many Latinos/as, particularly in the more open attitude toward public expression of a wide range of emotions. This cultural openness to emotional expression is manifested in the passionate testimonials, in the sometimes tearful spontaneous prayers during the worship service, and in the enthusiastic singing of each *corito* and worship song.

What Latino/a Protestant churches do in addition to celebration of the Word and the worship of the people is an important element in both Latino/a Protestant ecclesiology and the growth of Latino/a Protestant churches of all types. Many Latino/a Protestants, whatever their denominational affiliation or non-affiliation, have much more in common with each other than they do with many of their Anglo compatriots in the same denomination (Rodriguez 2011: 28).

A Latino/a Protestant ecclesiology also is informed by the responses of Latino/a Protestant churches to social problems within their own communities that represent an expanding understanding of the nature of ministry. This reimagining of ministry in response to *lo cotidiano* is another characteristic of Latino/a Protestant ecclesiology. The daily social reality compels Latino/a Protestants into an ongoing theological and practical reappraisal of identity and mission. For some this approach already is embraced, for others the local church's dominant theological and social understandings and its structure inhibit the direct confrontation of a particular need, but that does not prohibit the creation of a Christian faith-based organization to address the need.

Whether through local congregations or faith-based organizations this incarnation of Latino/a Protestant ecclesiology finds expression in many ways, such as children's ministry, providing basic health care and counseling, service organizations for the clergy, community-development organizations, providing adequate and affordable housing, ministry to runaway and street youth, Christian drug-rehabilitation centers, education programs, and job training, among others. These direct action efforts invite the agency of those they seek to serve, and they therefore spring up as Latino/a Protestant churches demonstrate their solidarity with the poor and marginalized and exercise a type of ecclesiology that makes a preferential option to meet the needs of Latino/a communities (Nanko-Fernández 2010: 40).

Latino/a Protestant ecclesiology emerging from the daily life of the churches contributes to the construction of a Latino/a Protestant worldview or ethos. This Latino/a Protestant ethos provides individuals, congregations, and other cooperative Latino/a Protestant organizations with the rationale and energizing resources to engage the wider culture and society and to enter the public sphere while maintaining the centrality of a personal encounter with God through Christ. This value is found among Latino/a Protestants whether they might be classified as Mainline, Evangelical, or Pentecostal. In fact, this Latino/a Protestant christocentric emphasis confounds traditional dominant classifications, as it displays cross-denominational solidarity. From that perspective it can be said that the Latino/a Protestant ecclesiology reflects a transformative power and not a mechanism for escape. For these religious communities, religion is defined across denominational and congregational boundaries in a very

christocentric way, living out some of the goals of ecumenism while, ironically, in many instances having very little to do with the ecumenical movement.

Engagement with the social realities of daily life is not a new thing. In some Latino/a Protestant congregations this engagement with the social context has been present since their origin, hence programs and efforts to address issues of drug addiction and housing appeared as intrinsic ministries of the local church, even given differences of opinion as to whether or not individual needs or systemic evils are being addressed. Among many Latino/a Protestants there seems to be little dispute that systemic evils exist, but there are theological differences regarding the spiritual nature of these. In those groups who restrict evangelism strictly to personal salvation, some have nevertheless addressed social problems by interpreting such activity as part of a ministry confronting evil in the name of Jesus. It is as if the magnitude of social problems within many Latino/a communities is such that they demand to be addressed, even when there might be a conflict with a particular group's received theology. Grassroots Latino/a Protestant ecclesiology allows space for inherited theology to be reinterpreted to allow for social engagement as contextualized ministry in the community.

Related to the preceding, another dimension of a Latino/a Protestant ecclesiology is the call to commitment by being part of a particular Latino/a Protestant congregation, through either formal membership or informal but regular association. This call of commitment is a significant involvement on the part of those who participate in individual congregations and ministries, since the usually held expectation is that church is more than a one-service-a-week affair (which contrasts with an increasing trend in Anglo congregations of attendance every two or three weeks). It is common for churches to hold at least two events on Sunday: a worship service and Sunday school. Furthermore, the days of the week are filled with meetings for men, women, youth, prayer, prison visitation, rallies, special services, regular Bible study, music lessons, and classes for citizenship, for General Educational Development examinations, and on how to become a homeowner. Even if an individual cannot be the epitome of involvement, there is consensus on what the ideal is for the committed Christian in terms of time and resources.

Through this call to commitment by expanding their activities throughout the week, the Latino/a Protestant churches construct their own everyday life-world that contributes to a shared sense of Latino/a Protestant ethos. The christocentric focus of the faith is not otherworldly but in an aggressive way informs the this-world activities of day-to-day life. This church-centered alternative sphere of life cannot be dismissively interpreted as a retreat from the world or escapism. From the perspective of those struggling through life in marginalized areas, the call to commitment of the Latino/a Protestant churches is held to be a life-affirming, world-changing, positive option. Certainly for some it becomes an escape from a life of destruction, but that is not the same thing as an escape from reality. Whether or not this alternative becomes an escapist lifestyle for an individual congregation or member depends in large part on how the gospel is understood to speak to the social condition of the Latino/a community.

Latino/a Protestant ecclesiology also is shaped by the ongoing social construction of race in the United States. Part of the racial/ethnic reality of the United States – and not just limited to Latinas and Latinos – is that many minoritized peoples are in fact multicultural by dint of being US minorities. That is to say, racial/ethnic minorities in the United States daily must know and negotiate the dominant public spheres as well as their own alternative counter-publics. Multicultural Latinos/as have a long history of moving in and out of the dominant public sphere on a daily basis, even if dominant groups have not recognized this engagement. What is observed may be an ongoing effort of the *iglesia evangélica* not to succumb to a bifurcation of life by not adhering to an “informal religious settlement” (which they had no part in negotiating), but to hold on to both public and private dimensions of faith and community. Latino/a Protestant ecclesiology involves not only multicultural identity, but also the daily cross-cultural reality of moving between distinct areas of society.

Several suggestions for future investigation and possible developments in Latino/a Protestant ecclesiology can be identified, the first of which is around issues of unity and universality of the church. One current negative aspect of Latino/a Protestant ecclesiology is lived out in the internal and external divisions between “families,” a type of dark side to one of the attributes identified earlier. Typically this is manifested when one pastor or congregation criticizes other Protestant and Roman Catholic Latinos/as. Pedraja comments on the situational absence of Christian unity and universality of the church in everyday Latino/a contexts as some Latino/a Protestant define themselves as being different from Catholics, “whom they believe to be idolatrous and unsaved, in need of conversion. On the other hand, some Catholics perceive Protestants as radicals who have not only broken from the true faith, but who also have abandoned their cultural and family traditions” (Pedraja 2003: 179). Another aspect of issues around church unity and universality emerges among some groups within Latino/a Protestantism on a primitivist/restorationist theme. It is at this point that some internal conflict among Latino/a Protestants is apparent as some advocate parting from those who are viewed as less committed to the faith. Furthermore, separatism nourishes the ambivalent feelings held by some Latino/a Protestants toward those who are not part of their immediate community, be they members of the Anglo/Euro American, African American, or Asian American communities or members of other Latino/a Protestant congregations. Despite these challenges of division and suspicion, Pedraja sees hope for the future in theological “common ground not by doctrinal agreement and shared practices, but by a common struggle and hope for liberation and justice that beckon us to a common goal” (Pedraja 2003: 181).

The distinctive characteristics of Latino/a Protestant ecclesiology support a type of cultural identity that is in constant dialogue with religious identity. This means that there is a need to explore further and test the assertion that there is a distinct Latino/a Protestant ethos that reflects patterns of belonging, self-identity, and sense-making of these religious communities. Such an exploration of a shared Latino/a Protestant ethos is necessary for a more balanced retelling of ecclesiology in general, as well as for understanding Latino/a religions and cultures.

Without doubt there is a strong eschatological faith within Latino/a Protestant churches, which is another area of further study for Latino/a Protestant ecclesiology. Some Latinos/as see the eschatological intervention of God in history as their only hope, have no real faith in their ability to change their situation through political and social involvement, and regularly preach about the coming end times. Others act upon a realized eschatology and question an exclusive focus on an eschatological future at the expense of not responding to the needs of the present, since it is perceived that preaching about the apocalypse does not do anything for the people – does not get rid of hunger, emotional problems, or any other troubles of daily life. Some ministers in the Latino/a community try to blaze a different path combining their real hope for the *eschaton* with a strategy of action for the present. Exploring these different approaches to eschatology while addressing *lo cotidiano* will give greater insight for grassroots Latino/a Protestant ecclesiology.

Concern for the *eschaton* in some sense is connected to notions of hope. The late Orlando Costas discussed minority/minoritized churches “as places of survival and hope” (Costas 1988: 136). The ministries of Latino/a Protestant churches demonstrate that the reality of specific social context can inform how ministry is carried out. Reciprocally faithful, uncompromising Christian ministry can be done in a way that is relevant to people’s holistic needs. Some Latino/a Protestant congregations are sensitive to their calls, and the contexts of their ministries have become “centers of survival,” not only for people in their communities today, but also for future generations. Costas named four dimensions at work in urban Latino/a churches: a dimension of psychological survival, in which “personal meaning” is found by the participant; a dimension of cultural survival, in which language becomes the essential tool for the expression of the Latino/a self; a dimension of social survival, in which people find others with whom solidarity can be built against a hostile environment; and finally a dimension of a horizon of hope that impels people toward a better future. That these four elements are at work in many Latino/a Protestant churches is evident in the response of those who, when confronted with seemingly overwhelming challenges and problems, have turned to those congregations in the community for help. Costas called for Latino/a Protestant churches to move beyond attitudes of survival and hope that solely focused on the internal life of the individual or congregation, and toward a liberative engagement with its social context through recognizing the limits of an ecclesiology of survival and hope, and he called for an ecclesiology of liberation (Costas 1988: 144). Therefore another suggested area of exploration is to assess the degree to which Costas’ call has been heeded. This is especially pertinent in that Costas influenced a generation of Latino/a leaders prior to his premature death.

Latino/a Protestantism seems to be in the process of developing a new type of ecclesiology. It may be surprising to learn the extent of the influence of the Latino/a Protestant churches not only within their own communities, but also in the larger society as a whole, and perhaps also to learn of its global reach. Many Latino/a Protestant churches become agents of stability and hope in communities confronted by a host of oppressions including high unemployment, family distress, inadequate

housing, educational crisis, generational stress, insufficient medical care, and rampant drug-trafficking. Latino/a Protestant churches demonstrate that effective Latino/a organizations do exist in the *barrios*, their own communities. Centers of survival, hope, liberation, and launch pads of creativity and innovation have emerged from the grassroots, led by and serving Latinos/as.

Evoking Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Pentecostal theologian Eldin Villafañe writes, "In the postmodern epoch that we must live in, the gospel needs to be incarnated in costly discipleship. The world looks at the church and wants to see in our lives the marks of the cross – not the search for comfort, prestige, power, or fame" (Villafañe 2006: 15). Many Latino/a Protestant churches exhibit the type of costly, contextual discipleship that Villafañe evokes as they continue to shape their own ecclesiology.

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CHAPTER 12

Grace, Sin, and Salvation

Roberto S. Goizueta

From the outset, US Latino/a theologians have been addressing the central Christian theme of grace, with important implications for the Christian understanding of salvation and sin. Whether explicitly or implicitly, Latino/a theologians have understood the theological enterprise as grounded in the self-revelatory activity of God in history (grace), including our own graced response to that divine activity (salvation). Latino/a theologians have likewise called attention to the personal and social obstacles to and distortions of this divine–human interaction (sin). In their reflections on grace, salvation, and sin, Latino/a theologians have drawn on the rich resources of the Christian theological tradition, while engaging the tradition critically from the perspective of a particular marginalized community. In so doing, they have made important contributions to the tradition’s ongoing development.

Latino/a analyses of grace have tended to emphasize certain aspects of divine grace as this has been understood historically. These emphases might be characterized as follows: (1) grace is never extrinsic to human nature or human experience, but is always mediated by and intrinsic to human nature and experience (i.e., there is no such thing as a “pure human nature” independent of God’s grace); (2) human nature and experience as mediators of divine grace can never be understood abstractly but only as inherently social and historical, which is to say, inherently cultural, political, economic, racial, gendered, etc.; (3) divine grace is also inherently practical, that is, grace is not a “thing” but is, rather, the ongoing, historical event of God’s self-revelatory action (love) in the world, revealed most fully in the person of Jesus Christ, which action/event calls forth from us an analogously practical response; (4) that divine action is always experienced as sheer gift, i.e., as Beauty; (5) precisely as gift, divine grace is both universally

available and preferentially encountered among the poor and marginalized, the outcasts; (6) this universality of grace implies that any Christian theology of grace must include a cosmology that locates the human within the larger, cosmic reality of God's self-gift in God's ongoing act of creation. Drawing on the work of specific theologians, this chapter will examine each of these six emphases in US Latino/a reflections on the theology of grace, together with their implications for the Christian understanding of salvation and sin.

In the last section of the chapter, I will suggest that implicit in these Latino/a reflections on the theology of grace is an understanding of grace as theosis, or deification. The notion of deification finds its roots at the very origins of Christian theology, in the Scriptures themselves.¹ However, its development as a theological category took place especially within Eastern Christianity: "the promise of Chalcedonian Christology is nothing less than the deification of our humanity" (Anatolios n.d.). With the eventual dominance of neo-scholastic theology in the West, however, the influence of deification was limited primarily to mystical theology and the contemplative tradition.² Deification thus came to be perceived as something accessible and relevant only to monks or religious. I will suggest that a Latino/a theology of grace can contribute to a Western retrieval of theosis as a central theological category with crucial socio-historical and, indeed, cosmic implications.

Human Nature as Graced

At the heart of all Christian theology, *qua* Christian, is the question of the relationship between grace and nature. This question is implicit, after all, in the assertion of Jesus Christ's full humanity and divinity: If, as true God and true human, Jesus Christ reveals to us both who God is and who we are, and if, therefore, to be human is to be related to God, *how* precisely is the human related to God? How is human nature related to God's self-revelation in history, or grace? The principal methodological approaches to this question have historically tended to be either extrinsicist or intrinsicist (integralist). While an extended analysis of the differences between and permutations of these approaches is beyond the scope of this chapter, an appreciation of the distinction is helpful for understanding a US Latino/a theology of grace and locating it in the larger context of the Christian theological tradition.

Briefly, then, the extrinsicist position posits the relative autonomy of the natural vis-à-vis the supernatural. In this account, human nature is self-sufficient unless and until divine grace acts "upon" nature, or is "super-added" to nature. Such a view has many implications for theological method, since it implies that human nature as such can be understood without the aid of divine revelation. Certain forms of natural law philosophy, for instance, presuppose that the nature of the human can be known apart from divine revelation, simply through the discernment of the laws implicit in human nature.³

The intrinsicist or integralist position, on the other hand, rejects the very notion of a "pure human nature" that exists independent of divine grace; the human, precisely *as*

human, is inherently graced from the beginning. This suggests, further, that we cannot truly know the human except as already and always a historical mediation of God's gracious activity in the world. Likewise, we encounter divine revelation not as some "thing" that impinges upon human nature from the outside, but as a dimension of human nature that, while still radically discontinuous with nature (Mystery), is nevertheless always encountered *within* human nature as that which draws it forward to its full realization.⁴

Orlando Espín notes that "it is in the ongoing act of creation that we first detect that which can be called grace – God's loving self given to us and for us as an expression of that which God is" (Espín 1992: 137). This is what it means to suggest that the human person is made in the image and likeness of God: "We have the very being of God inscribed in our own being, to the point that we cannot understand ourselves apart from this imprint. ... Our very being is graced" (Espín 1992: 138–9).

If the human person is graced, then "sin" is whatever obscures or contravenes that reality (González 2010: 67). Because divine grace is at the very heart of human existence, any violation of the human person is likewise a contravention of God's presence and activity in history. As such, sin denies the divine ground of all existence and replaces it with some other source of ultimate value. The fundamental sin, then, is idolatry: "The essence of sin is idolatry, that is, striving to supplant the Creator with something or someone else" (De La Torre and Aponte 2001: 80). In Espín's words, "sin, in the last analysis, is an extremely irresponsible attempt to become that which we are not" (Espín 1992: 140). If indeed we are created in God's image, sin represents and fosters the denial of that fact.

Grace as Socio-Historical

If there is no such thing as a pure human nature that is not already graced, that does not already mediate the presence of its Creator in history, then neither is there such a thing as an autonomous, isolated, individual human being; human being is inherently relational. The person is inherently receptive to the Other in whose own Trinitarian life the person participates and toward whom the person is inherently open. And that relationality is not abstract, but is itself social and historical; our relationships to God and others are mediated by – or carried out through – the many socio-historical structures in which we live and which inform our lives: e.g., family, schools, cultural institutions, political and legal structures, economic systems, and class structures. Consequently, our reception of and response to divine grace is likewise mediated by socio-historical relationships and structures.

One Latino/a theologian who has articulated such a theology of grace explicitly and systematically is Miguel Díaz, in his *On Being Human: U.S. Hispanic and Rahnerian Perspectives*. Here the Cuban American theologian analyzes the mutually implicit relationship between an integralist theology of grace and theological anthropology. However, he also goes further. Drawing on the work of Latino/a theologians such as

García-Rivera, Isasi-Díaz, Espín, Elizondo, García, and Goizueta, he stresses the inherently socio-historical character of grace, including that of our grace-ful response to divine grace. Because, like “human nature,” divine grace is not a “thing,” grace is encountered only through historical relationships and structures, as their deepest dimension. Consequently, grace is itself always mediated culturally, socially, psychologically, politically, economically, sexually, ecologically, and so on. If nature can never be thought of in the abstract, therefore, neither can grace:

Within U.S. Hispanic theology, “nature” is not an abstract reality. Nor is nature understood as a formal and ontological structure of being (as is the case, for instance, with Aquinas who defines nature in terms of a principle of operation that defines not only what a thing is but also how a thing acts with respect to its end-purpose). In U.S. Hispanic theology, concrete historical experiences become essential in defining who people are and who they become as they encounter and respond to grace *within their history*. Thus, nature is revealed in and through concrete historical subjects and all other creatures ... Grace is perhaps the most common thread that runs throughout the visions we have examined. These visions exemplify how the experience of grace is not only cultural (as Espín affirms), but is also a social and engendered experience. (Díaz 2001: 56)

As Díaz argues, the socio-historical mediations of grace are manifold. Latino/a theologians, however, have given particular attention to the ways in which *culture*, specifically, informs our relationships to God and others, or the ways in which culture mediates grace in history. An early – and still perhaps the most systematic – articulation of the role of culture in a theology of grace was that set forth by Orlando Espín in his seminal essay, “Grace and Humanness.” There, Espín argues for the centrality of culture for any theology of grace while, at the same time, warning against any reduction of grace to culture:

The way a people or a person experientially perceives the love of God, and the way they respond to it, will always be cultural. In other words, there is no acultural Christianity, just as there is no acultural option for God, love, and salvation. Therefore, if to be human is to be an image of God, and if to be an image of God is to be foundationally graced, then this is also a cultural reality, because no one can be truly human outside of culture. ... Grace as it is in itself (that is, God’s eternal, inner self as love) is not bound by culture. But grace as it is for and within us (which is the only grace we can experience) shows itself as cultural because we are cultural. ... If God as grace- in-itself is eternally transcending history and culture, God as grace-for-and-within-us would be utterly meaningless and beyond our perception unless that grace entered our creaturely world, worked through and within our history and our cultures, and molded itself to our (cultural!) understanding, making it possible for us to see and touch the gracious actions of the God-who-is-for-us. (Espín 1992: 145–6)

Consequently, any Christian theology of grace must be able to account for the necessarily “cultured” experience of divine grace in history; theology must be able to

engage and understand the manifold cultural mediations of God's self-revelation in history. As a further methodological corollary, theology must collaborate with those other scholarly disciplines (e.g., sociology, ethnography) whose objects of study are precisely the many social structural dimensions of human experience, including culture.

With respect to Latino/a cultures specifically, Latino/a theological scholarship has focused on several key characteristics, especially the experience of *mestizaje* (racial-cultural mixture) and the widespread phenomenon of popular religion, as privileged places where Latinos/as encounter God's loving self-revelation. (See, e.g., Elizondo 2000 and Medina 2009.) Nevertheless, as Díaz suggests, Latino/a theologians have underscored numerous aspects of Latino/a culture as *loci theologici*, or social contexts within which Latinos/as encounter divine grace:

The "Galilean" face of grace, *mestizaje*, *acompañamiento*, the historically minded notions of the "kin-dom" of God, the notion of charity as solidarity, the notion of exile, the "highly contextual" nature of U.S. Hispanic experience, *la lucha*, the garden of asymmetries, and the "functional" social image of Trinity, all suggest this contextual approach. In all of these, grace is encountered in the ordinary (*lo cotidiano*) private and public spaces of U.S. Hispanic experiences. (Díaz 2001: 56)

If divine grace is always mediated socio-historically, then the Christian bears a fundamental responsibility toward social structures, including culture; to depreciate or undermine a people's cultural life is to undermine that community's access to God's salvific will. The manifestations of human sin, therefore, are never exclusively personal but always also social. In the words of Miguel De La Torre and Edwin Aponte:

Hispanics emphasize the importance of communal or corporate sin. Rather than simply linking the causes of sin to the inheritance of Adam, Hispanics understand sin, as a result of powers and principalities (Eph. 6:12), to be inherent within social structures. Hence, Jesus' purpose was not solely to save individuals from their sins but also, and just as importantly, to save the community from the sins of its social structures. Race, class, and gender oppression transcend the individual's personal bias by becoming the collective bias of society. These biases, in turn, are institutionalized by the society in the government, the marketplace, and the church. (De La Torre and Aponte 2001: 81–2)

Salvation from sin, therefore, necessarily includes a social dimension; the transformation of the person is inextricably linked with the transformation of those social structures, those communal bonds which inform the person's relationship to others and, ultimately, to God. That link is embodied, above all, in the person of Jesus Christ:

Many Hispanic Christians see a Jesus who links salvation with the praxis of liberation ... Although Latinas/os agree that salvation begins as a love praxis from God, they insist that the works of the believer are an outward expression of an inward conversion. ... Hispanics link salvation with the treatment of those who are oppressed. ... To be saved is (1) to be

liberated from the sins of the individual through the acceptance of a new life in Christ; (2) to be liberated from the oppressive economic, political, and social conditions that constitute corporate sin; and (3) to take control of one's own destiny. In the deepest sense possible, liberation is salvation. (De La Torre and Aponte 2001: 86)

The understanding of salvation articulated in the writings of Latino/a theologians is thus a corollary of their understanding of human nature as graced, and their understanding of grace as mediated socio-historically. As Miguel Díaz has argued, salvation history is inseparable from "profane" history and is the deepest dimension of this latter:

Salvation cannot be understood in "merely" religious terms, as a divine promise that concerns the world to come, bearing no relationship to the survival of and transformation of the present one. God's radical activity in the world, especially God's presence in Jesus, where human reality is not destroyed but rather "assumed", "raised", "perfected", and "transformed", underscores the theological referent of all created and historical reality. (Díaz 2009: 105)

Salvation and human liberation are integrally related; there can be no "individual" salvation since there is no individual, autonomous human being. In the words of Díaz, "outside survival of community there is no salvation" (Díaz 2009: 105–6). Such an assertion, he notes, is grounded in God's own communal, Trinitarian life, in which we are invited to participate (Díaz 2009: 105–6).

Grace as Practical

To say that grace is never abstract but always historical is also to suggest that it is always *practical*. Divine grace is the *action* of God (theopraxis) in the world, which action calls forth our own practical response: "Praxis ... is always understood as communal and as gift [grace]. Freedom is always freedom exercised 'within the kingdoms of this world in response to grace'" (Díaz 2001: 57 [my emphasis]).

If grace is fundamentally practical, that is, God's self-disclosive praxis in history, then one's own praxis, or historical action, is likewise fundamentally a participation in and response to God's own action. There is no such thing as an autonomous human subject since one's own historical agency is dependent upon God's prior action; human praxis presupposes divine praxis. In his book *Christ Our Companion*, Roberto Goizueta contends that this is precisely the understanding of human praxis underlying US Latino/a popular religion; here, human praxis is always essentially an act of receptivity and response to divine action in one's life and in the world. Praxis is inherently relational, receptive, and responsive:

Christian praxis is, at bottom, a praxis of grateful reception and response; before praxis is the action of a historical agent, [it is] the action of a recipient; before it is action-as-doing, it is action-as-receiving. More specifically, we become historical agents precisely in the praxis of reception and response. ... Our ability to recognize, receive, and embrace, in the

crucified and risen Christ, the concrete, unrepeatable form of God's love as the source of our very identity is inseparable from the ability to embody that love in our social praxis; these are two inseparable dimensions of Christian praxis as a praxis of reception and response. ... Faith in Christ, then, is not so much an expression of our search for God as our response to God's search for us. (Goizueta 2009: 101, 104–5)

Grace, then, is not a “thing” but an *act*, God's self-disclosive act. Likewise, salvation is not a thing but the *event* of God's self-disclosive act and our own participation in that divine activity through our own receptivity to God's “prior” action and our response to that divine action. To say that grace is practical, then, is to imply that it is *inter-active* and, hence, relational; through grace, we participate in God's life:

Grace has been called the “God-relation.” Grace as the “God-relation” makes the point that grace is less a “thing” than a relationship. ... The relation, as such, cannot be mere connectedness between God and the human. The God-relation is quite intimate. It is also communion. (García-Rivera 2003: 112–13)

Conversely, sin may be defined as a closure to that divine action and, consequently, the assertion of an autonomous human subjectivity in isolation from God and, thus, from others. Because it is necessarily communal and relational, God's loving activity in history effects and transforms human relationships and communities; grace and salvation effect reconciliation and are thus inherently communal:

We find it difficult to understand that justification by grace through faith is necessarily a collective phenomenon. ... Grace is automatically collective: there is no grace that does not tend towards the construction of this new Israel of God. There is no faith in Jesus that is not intrinsically related to his founding and edifying this new humanity, and there is no making righteous that does not involve a movement away from a certain sort of social “belonging,” kept safe by casting out victims, and a simultaneous movement towards the fraternal construction of the people of the victim present in all the world. (James Alison quoted in Goizueta 2009: 41)

If grace creates and fosters communion, sin creates and fosters isolation, alienation, and estrangement. If to be a person is to be loved and to love, or to be in communion, then sin is whatever brings about isolation, estrangement, and abandonment.

The movement which grace effects from estrangement to communion is exemplified most fully in the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ. The crucifixion represents not only the physical death of an individual, Jesus of Nazareth, but the rupture of all those relationships which had helped form him, including the relationship with God (“My God, my God ... ?”). His closest friends, the Apostles, had abandoned him out of fear for their own lives. The cross symbolizes the death of that community which shaped Jesus' own life and identity. Likewise, the resurrection is not merely the resurrection of an autonomous individual, but the resurrection and transformation of that ruptured community. What had been ruptured by sin is now reconciled by God in the

person of the crucified and risen Christ. When, after his resurrection, he approaches the disciples in the upper room, Jesus does not excoriate them for having fled in fear at the moment when he most needed their support. Rather, he forgives them: “Peace be with you.” In the risen Christ, God thus resurrects not only Jesus himself but the community which sin had torn asunder. Because grace and salvation are inherently communal realities, Christ’s resurrection – as the paradigmatic action of divine grace in history – must also be inherently communal. Christ’s “post”-resurrection appearances to the disciples are themselves intrinsic to his resurrection. Because grace is practical, it is inherently relational – and, because it is relational, it effects reconciliation (Goizueta 2009: 25–43).

Grace as Beautiful

Salvation is utterly gratuitous in that it is made possible by the prevenient divine action in our lives. Our own reception and response are themselves made possible by the gratuitous divine action, i.e., grace. To say that divine action is always gratuitous is to say that it is experienced as “Beauty,” to which the most appropriate response is awe, wonder, or enjoyment. Beauty always confronts us as sheer gift, as that which stops us in our tracks and renders us speechless. Beauty is likewise experienced as unmerited, beyond our capacity to comprehend or produce through our own efforts (García-Rivera 2009: 59). As sheer gratuity, Beauty compels, attracts, and draws us to itself. Thus, Beauty presupposes and demands communion. As Beauty, divine grace draws us into God’s own loving activity in the world.

At the heart of US Latino/a theology, and at the heart of the US Latino/a worldview, is a profound sense of reality as beautiful. This aesthetic sense underlies US Latino/a experience, even when that experience manifests itself most immediately as *inhuman*, painful, or oppressive – insofar as this suffering is engaged in common, accompanied by others and, ultimately, by God. (What is beautiful is not the suffering itself, then, but the bonds of love forged and reinforced in our confrontation with suffering.) This fundamental experience of life as gift, as Beauty, is itself liberating in that it generates hope and empowers Latinos and Latinas in their struggles for survival and justice; we can soldier on because we know that, regardless of the success or failure of our efforts, their ultimate value derives not from their effectiveness but from the gratuitous relationships that have been forged in the midst of those struggles – relationships with both our human companions and our Divine Companion. As divine praxis, grace reveals the fundamentally gratuitous character of human praxis. Life is beautiful, no matter what – because life is defined by loving relationships, even in the midst of suffering (see, e.g., Goizueta 1995: 77–100, 110n.4 quoting Victor Villaseñor).

Yet sheer gift, sheer gratuity is also terrifying since, by definition, gratuity is beyond our control; we have no control over when, where, or by whom a gift is offered. Thus, we are always tempted to close ourselves to grace by specifying – and assuming we can know – when, where, and by whom we will encounter God’s self-revelation. Sin is characterized

by this desire to specify God's self-disclosure in history, thereby closing ourselves to the utter gratuity of that self-disclosure. We will thus tend to identify God's grace with power, domination, control, wealth, authority, privilege, and so on.⁵

Grace as Universal and Preferential

US Latino/a theologians contend that, because divine grace is both gratuitous and universal, it is revealed especially in one particular historical context: that of marginalization. Miguel Díaz insists on the integral connection between the universality of grace and God's preferential love for the marginalized: "The focus on the preferential accompaniment of grace runs throughout U.S. Hispanic visions of humanity. ... Everyone and everything is open to receive grace and the Trinitarian life of God, but, suggest Hispanic theologians, openness lies most with the persons and places associated with poverty, marginalization, and oppression" (Díaz 2001: 58).

Roberto Goizueta argues that, because God's loving action in history is revealed and embodied most fully in the person of the crucified and risen Christ, that action is revealed in a special way among those persons who today continue to be crucified (Goizueta 2009: 36–40). Here Goizueta draws on the insights of Gustavo Gutiérrez to articulate the foundational importance of the preferential option for the poor for all US Latino/a theology, including the theology of grace:

The Peruvian priest [Gutiérrez] thus suggests that, if one reads the Scriptures from the perspective of the poor, one discovers two overarching and mutually implicit themes, 1) the universality and gratuity of God's love, and 2) God's preferential option for the poor. ... Though these two themes appear, at first glance, to be mutually contradictory, they are, in fact, mutually implicit. If 1) God's love is universal and gratuitous (i.e., given freely to all of us equally), and 2) God's love is made manifest in history, and 3) that history includes injustice, conflict, and division, then 4) God's love *must* take sides with the victims of that injustice, conflict, and division. Consequently, the grounds for this option are not in the poor themselves but in God. (Goizueta 1995: 175–6)

If divine grace is truly universal and gratuitous, then it will be encountered in a special, privileged way (not "exclusively" but "preferentially") among those persons who – society assumes – *least* deserve God's love. Thus, the character of grace as sheer gift universally offered is itself safeguarded by the character of grace as preferentially revealed among the poor.

Citing approvingly the work of Vitor Westhelle, José D. Rodríguez makes a similar argument from a Protestant Latino/a perspective:

It is Westhelle's conviction that the *Protestant* nature of Latin American liberation movements provides a more adequate understanding of Luther's teaching of the cross, as a theological perspective enabling our comprehension of God's self-revelation in history. His

claim is that the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation and these Latin American militant movements share a common eschatological vision in which their mutual experience of exclusion and condemnation leads to the possibility of a truly liberating experience. (Rodríguez 2009: 130)

Rodríguez thus calls for a retrieval of the Lutheran understanding of a “theologian of the cross” as central to the Christian theologian’s self-understanding. Moreover, he argues, it is precisely in God’s self-revelation on the cross – and, thus, in the “million ghetto crosses out there” – that we encounter the utter gratuity of God’s self-revelation (Rodríguez 2009: 130). Referring to the writings of Piri Thomas, Rodríguez notes that:

Deliverance comes as a gift. It’s not the product of our own doing. For Piri, this central teaching of faith became true at the point when he felt fatally destined to return to the horrible experience of prison. Hanging on a ghetto cross, torn by the scorn and deceit of evil forces, he encounters once again the gracious initiative of God. (Rodríguez 2009: 129–30)

If God’s gratuitous self-revelation takes place in a special way among the marginalized of our world, then to close ourselves off to those on the margins, or to ostracize and exclude them, is to close ourselves off to God, to exclude God’s own self-revelation. Injustice is thus always a sin not only against the victims but against God, who is embodied and revealed especially among the victims of injustice. In a very real sense, the poor are the privileged bearers of God’s salvific activity in the world. Therefore, to close ourselves off to the poor is to close ourselves off to God’s salvific action.

Grace as Cosmic

The universality and gratuity of divine grace, as revealed in God’s preferential identification with the marginalized, further implies a *cosmology* of grace: “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Romans 8:20-1). Such an understanding of the cosmic character of God’s self-gift is at the heart of a Latino/a theology of grace, for it is implied in all five of the prior characteristics of a Latino/a theology of grace. The sacramental (material, sensorial), socio-historical, and aesthetic characters of God’s self-revelation make the cosmos itself the fundamental locus of that revelation. God is not a “watchmaker” who creates the world, winds it up, and then lets it run on its own while God stays safely ensconced in “heaven.” Rather, the Creator always remains intimately and integrally related to creation, which continues to reveal the divine activity in history. For Latino/a theologians, then, the cosmos is itself intrinsically symbolic, that is, it makes present and reveals its transcendent source. The cosmos does not “point to” a Creator only externally related to creation, but it makes the Creator available to us here and now, in the warp and weft of everyday life. It is in and through the cosmos that we become united to God (García-Rivera 2009: 11; Goizueta 2009).

This cosmology is inherited from the medieval and baroque Christianity that was brought to the “New World”:

Medieval Christianity had a unified, profoundly sacramental view of the cosmos; creation everywhere revealed the abiding presence of its Creator, a living presence that infused all creation with meaning. ... As the place where one encountered the living, transcendent God, all creation was intrinsically symbolic; that is, creation re-presented God, making the transcendent God present in time and space for us, here and now. That God had not made the world only to withdraw from it, leaving it to its own devices; rather, the Creator remained intimately united to creation. All creation was thus assumed to be intrinsically meaningful and intelligible by virtue of the fact that creation was graced from the beginning. The sacred would therefore be encountered, not above or outside creation, but in and through creation. (Goizueta 2009: 64–5)

Because creation is “graced from the beginning,” our access to the gift of grace is through our engagement with creation; the person does not stand apart from creation as an observer but is necessarily an integral element of and participant in creation (Goizueta 2009: 65).

No one has more systematically articulated such a Latino/a theological cosmology than Alejandro García-Rivera. García-Rivera defines a theological cosmology in the following terms:

Let me suggest that a theological cosmology attempts to “see” God in all things. It makes visible the inner meaning of phenomena by allowing them to move the human heart. In other words, a theological cosmology is an aesthetics of creation. Like science, it pays attention to the phenomena of the universe, but it also attempts to “see” the inner meaning of all things. A theological cosmology, however, recognizes that for the human there can be no detached observation. Phenomena proper to a cosmos move the human heart. We do not simply observe; we participate. ... God did not mean to stand outside of God’s own creation but to dwell in and inhabit it. God means to live with us in a cosmos that reflects and allows all creatures to participate in God’s own goodness and life. Our ability to see a cosmos is our ability to experience God’s presence in all things. This is not pantheism. It is not even panentheism. It is the garden of God. (García-Rivera 2009: 21–2)

If one reads that definition carefully, one can discern all six characteristics of the Latino/a theology of grace. So, for instance, because God’s presence in the cosmos moves and attracts us, it demands participation and engagement, i.e., praxis. Our access to God, as One who “dwells in and inhabits” the cosmos, depends on our participation in God’s own activity in history and creation. Just as we cannot know another person by simply observing them from a distance but must engage and participate in an actual relationship with them, so too is it impossible to know God through mere observation, from a distance; one must immerse oneself in the world wherein God’s own life is being made present to us every day (García-Rivera 2009: 65).

Latino/a theology thus conceives divine transcendence as “intracosmic transcendence,” encountered not “beyond” the cosmos but in its very interstices (Rivera 2007: 39–54). Drawing on the work of Ignacio Ellacuría, for instance, Mayra Rivera speaks of

divine transcendence as “transcendence *in* all beings” (Rivera 2007: 46 [my emphasis]). Quoting the Jesuit philosopher, she avers that “it is not ‘simply that God is in all things, as essence, presence, and potential’ – following Aquinas’s description of God’s relation to creation – but that the Trinitarian life is ‘*intrinsic* to all things’” (Rivera 2007: 46). If God is in creation and creation in God, there can be no autonomous existence, no “pure nature.” Rivera thus challenges the modern dichotomy between (human) history and (material) nature:

History is inseparable from nature. While many idealist notions of history tend to view history as proceeding in a linear fashion, Ellacuria contends that the “time of history” is “a biological time.” Time cannot be detached from things, just like possibilities cannot be conceived in isolation from their material ground. ... The relationship between nature and history is always intrinsic and mutually determining. Just as nature flows into history, history flows into nature. (Rivera 2007: 43)

The cosmic character of grace thus implies the integral relation of history and nature, inasmuch as both participate in and reveal God’s cosmic self-communication. Just as *human* nature is not a “thing” that exists apart from its divine ground, neither is the “natural” world merely a collection of “things” which we can know simply by observing and analyzing them:

Rather than being isolated entities, we are all open to one another. It is not simply that things necessarily relate to one another, but that they only are what they are, or better, they only *become* in relation to others. In other words, relationality is not constituted by (and thus after) the things related, but the things are constituted by relationality. The unity of the universe is more than a conceptual abstraction; it is a principle of reality: everything is “intrinsically and constitutively” connected to all other things. (Rivera 2007: 42)

Such a cosmology has necessary implications for the Christian understanding of salvation and sin. If all creation is intrinsically and constitutively relational, then the character of salvation must itself reflect this reality. The reconciliation with God effected in Christ, therefore, can never be conceived as simply individualistic, since there is no such thing as an individual. Such a reconciliation must involve the whole person, together with all those bonds to others and to creation that help constitute the person. As García-Rivera avers, “salvation for the human has high stakes. It not only involves the human but the entire universe” (García-Rivera 2009: viii). García-Rivera thus calls for a retrieval of the spatial character of salvation: “What is missing in the contemporary Christian tale of salvation is the human place in the cosmos” (García-Rivera 2009: ix). Salvation involves not just history but nature: “Christian emphasis on salvation history as opposed to inheriting the land does not jibe with either the Old Testament or New Testament witness” (García-Rivera 2009: 44). The cosmos is not simply something inert “out there,” distinct from human history; it embraces and participates in history. Consequently, salvation history is not just temporal (the fulfillment of time) but spatial (the reconciliation of the cosmos *in* Christ or, in biblical terms, “inheriting the land”):

In other words, heaven and earth are not dual principles in conflict with one another. Heaven and earth are regions of the one land that have been separated through sin. To those who might still see this as dualism, I would point out that, in Paul, eschatology reveals the crucial role of grace. Grace allows us to live in Christ risen and ascended to heaven. This Christ is now reconciling heaven and earth taking the cosmos to a redeeming end that, ultimately, is a place, a place where every tear shall be wiped away. (García-Rivera 2009: 65)

Most fundamentally, then, sin takes the form of estrangement from this original organic unity. "Original sin," writes García-Rivera, "is original challenge to find our home in the cosmos" (García-Rivera 2009: 19). The sin of Adam and Eve led to their expulsion and estrangement from the Garden of Eden; salvation implies a regaining of their original innocence (García-Rivera 2009: 76).

Grace as Deification (Theosis)

Implicit in all six characteristics of a Latino/a theology of grace, as already discussed, is an emphasis on the participatory, unitive, or relational character of divine self-communication; divine grace sets into motion a dynamic whereby we are drawn into union with others, the cosmos, and, ultimately, God. In the person of Christ, God invites us to not only imitate God's praxis in history but actually participate in that praxis; grace compels us not only to emulate and follow Christ but to participate in Christ himself, to become conformed to Christ, to live *in* Christ. Through God's self-communication and our response, we participate in God's own Trinitarian life. In suggesting that this understanding of grace is implicit in a Latino/a theology of grace as adumbrated earlier, therefore, I am suggesting that such a theology represents a contemporary retrieval of the classic Athanasian assertion that, in the person of Christ, "God became human that humans might become God" (St Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word*). According to Athanasius, "we become through grace what God is by nature" (St Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word*). This means that the privileged mode of knowledge is *participation*; salvation is union through participation, while sin is alienation through estrangement, from others, the cosmos, and God. To receive God's grace is to affirm our participation in the divine life.⁶

If grace is intrinsic to human nature (the first characteristic in this chapter), then the human is fundamentally intrinsic to the divine life itself, and vice versa. To say that "God is love" is to say that, by definition, God is always and everywhere "God-for-us." Thus, the human person is, by definition, always and everywhere a participant in this love. Just as there is no such thing as an autonomous individual, so too is God not an autonomous individual. We do not say that "God loves" (i.e., that, first, God exists and, then, God "loves"); instead, we say that God *is* love.

This fundamental union with God is not abstract, or even mythological, but socio-historical; this is the meaning of the Incarnation. Thus, the process of deification can never be understood as merely individualistic or "spiritual" (if by "spiritual" one means separate from history). To become one with God is to become conformed to the person of Christ, to participate in Christ's own ongoing activity in history, as a response to God's

definitive self-gift in the Crucified and Risen Christ. On the cross Christ draws us to himself so that, by participating in his crucifixion, we can participate in his resurrection. As socio-historical, this dynamic of “becoming human so that humans might become divine” necessarily implies not only personal deification but social structural transformation. It is not just the person who participates in the divine Trinitarian life, but all of history – including social structures, themselves destined to be transformed into the Reign of God.

More specifically, what Latino/a theology can contribute to the Christian understanding of deification is the central role of the preferential option for the poor, or the cross, as the privileged locus for participating in the divine life. Needless to say, any emphasis on humans “becoming divine” risks devolving into the most base kind of idolatry unless it is rooted in the Christian belief that Calvary is the place where the divine self-gift is made most fully manifest.⁷ Consequently, any understanding of salvation as participation in the divine, Trinitarian life must take as its starting point the cross as the place where the nature of Christ’s love for us is revealed as, indeed, divine. Paradoxically, Christ’s cry of abandonment on the cross makes evident Christ’s complete identification with the Father and with us (“Truly, this was God’s son”) (Goizueta 2009). When we ourselves enter into solidarity with Christ on the cross, we participate in his sufferings and thus, ultimately, in his resurrection. We do this insofar as we enter into solidarity with all those persons in whom Christ continues to be crucified today, those whom the theologian Jon Sobrino and the philosopher Ignacio Ellacuria have called “the crucified people” (Sobrino 2008).

Thus, a Latino/a theology of grace can effect a critical retrieval of the Christian tradition of deification, or theosis. In the self-emptying love of Christ, through which God becomes fully one with us, divine grace empowers us to become fully one with God. The cross is the linchpin of that “exitus-reditus,” i.e., the divine descent that makes possible the human ascent. It is on the cross that the human and divine are revealed as one – again, paradoxically in Christ’s cry of abandonment. On the cross, God refuses to abandon Jesus, though God’s intimate presence is experienced as silence and absence. That such silence and absence were indeed the mode of God’s presence is finally confirmed in the resurrection.

So, how can we today participate in Christ’s crucifixion, thereby opening ourselves to the gift of his resurrection? We do so to the extent that we participate in Christ’s ongoing crucifixion today, among the poor, the dispossessed, the excluded. This is the significance, for instance, of the Via Crucis that is so central to Latino/a popular religion. Here we celebrate the resurrection that takes place when God’s self-gift, in the person of Jesus Christ, invites us to participate in his own journey, thereby assuring us that we are not alone and that, therefore, we can dare to hope. The hope engendered is not simply that individual life will conquer death but, even more extravagantly daring, the hope that “they may all be one, just as you, Father are in me, and I in you, *that they may also be in us*, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:21 [my emphasis]). The notion of deification is thus implicit in the intrinsicist understanding of grace that underlies US Latino/a theology. The Crucified and Risen Christ is the confirmation and assurance that theosis is not only a possibility but, indeed, an imperative. The Christian is called to respond to divine grace by participating in the ongoing activity of God in history, thereby

“becoming through grace what God is by nature.” We do this, above all, by participating in God’s own preferential, liberating love for the poor.

Notes

- 1 E.g., “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire” (2 Peter 1:3-4); “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:2); “This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit” (1 John 4:13). For an analysis of the Pauline warrants for theosis, see especially Michael Gorman (2009).
- 2 This despite the fact that the notion of theosis clearly appears in the writings of Thomas Aquinas, e.g., “Now the gift of grace surpasses every capability of created nature, since it is nothing short of a partaking of the Divine Nature, which exceeds every other nature. And thus it is impossible that any creature should cause grace. For it is as necessary that God alone should deify, bestowing a partaking of the Divine Nature by a participated likeness, as it is impossible that anything save fire should enkindle” (*Summa Theologiae* II-I. 112. 1).
- 3 One historically influential example of such extrinsicism is neo-scholastic theology: “For post-Reformation scholastics, ‘pure nature’ became not just a hypothetical, possible state of man, but an actual state of man” (Leithart 2011: 106).
- 4 Perhaps the most influential modern Protestant and Catholic exemplars of such an intrinsicist view are Paul Tillich and Karl Rahner respectively.
- 5 Drawing on the work of the social psychologist Ernest Becker, Goizueta has suggested that underlying this sinful tendency is a “denial of death,” or a refusal to accept our fundamental contingency, mortality, and hence “giftedness” (Goizueta 2009: 15–18).
- 6 This dynamic of reception, response, and participation is expressed, for instance, in the traditional Catholic collect recited in Advent: “O God, Creator and Redeemer of human nature, who willed that your Word should take flesh in an ever-virgin womb, look with favor on our prayers, that your Only Begotten Son, having taken to himself our humanity, may be pleased to grant us a share in his divinity.”
- 7 Michael Gorman makes a similar argument in his book *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*: “[Paul’s] understanding of holiness, therefore, is a participatory one. It puts additional flesh on the bones of ... God’s kenotic, cruciform identity revealed in the cross and leading to the practice of cruciformity, which is in fact theoformity, or theosis” (Gorman 2009: 106) and, again, “Theosis is transformative participation in the kenotic, cruciform character of God through Spirit-enabled conformity to the incarnate, crucified, and resurrected/glorified Christ” (Gorman 2009: 7).

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CHAPTER 13

Eschatology and Hope

Luis G. Pedraja

Our society is obsessed with the future, in particular with knowing what the future holds. This is a natural part of being human. Our ability to anticipate what is ahead helps us to better prepare for it, or, in some cases, change it. We have an inherent fear of the dark – not in the literal sense of a 5-year-old's fear, but in a more figurative sense. We dread what might lie lurking around the corner or in our future. We are inquisitive by nature and fear the unknown. Hollywood and the media both feed on and into our fears of the future. If we believe either of them, whether it is the next global extinction event, pandemic, or zombie apocalypse, some cataclysm of universal proportions is bound to get us at the end. Although I do not often give credence to most prophetic predictions circulating today, I will make my own prediction. Everyone reading these words will experience the end of the world. While zombies most likely will not feast on you any time soon, the world will end in your lifetime. At some point, you will die and the world will end for you. Nothing lasts forever; things continually change. Whether the world ends or we cease to be part of the world, all of us must contend with our finite nature.

Eschatology is ultimately about ends. Typically, eschatology covers such topics as the end of the world, death, and the afterlife, including our beliefs about heaven and hell. However, to understand eschatology simply as a terminus of existence would not be entirely accurate. Eschatology is not about nihilism, but about transformation. A nihilistic eschatology would be demonic, destroying solely for the sake of destruction. Transformation is an inherent aspect of creation. To create something new, the old forms and structures must come to an end.¹ Thus, we cannot separate eschatology from God's creative activity. Neither humanity nor creation is static in nature. Both are in a state of continual change and transformation. Eschatology is an inherent part of God's creative process, not the end of creation. If we focus merely on eschatology as an end,

we are missing the point. Isaiah introduces us to a creative God that summons us not to dwell in the past, but to envision a transformed future: “Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland” (Isaiah 43:18–19). In the same manner, Isaiah 65:17 and Revelation 21:1 portrays the passing of the heavens and the earth not as an end, but as a transformation that replaces them with a new heaven and a new earth. Unfortunately, most of us tend to dwell more on apocalyptic visions of suffering, tribulation, and a fiery end to creation than on the redemptive and transformative nature of eschatology.²

The Context of Eschatology

All theology is contextual.³ Thus, it is important to acknowledge from the onset that all eschatological discussion is contextual. Latino/a eschatology is influenced by culture, but so is a Western European eschatology. Unless we acknowledge that all our eschatological views are to some degree contextual, we run the risk of privileging one perspective over another. In addition, a person’s economic and social location, worldview, political affectations, education, and life history also shape that individual’s eschatology. If you are in a position of power, you may be more drawn to an eschatology that extends your power. On the other hand, if you are poor or oppressed, you may be drawn to a different eschatology that changes the status quo. The same contrast that Martin Luther noted between a theology of the cross and a theology of glory can be applied to eschatology.

Although all theology is contextual, I would argue that eschatology is influenced by context to a greater extent than some of the other doctrines. Most doctrines focus on a particular past event. Eschatology, on the other hand, while grounded on tenets of the Christian faith, pertains to present and future events. As a result, it is subject to more dynamic interpretations and to the vicissitudes of shifting historical contexts. It is not our legacy, but our destiny that is at stake. Contemporary events coupled with our own anxieties about our future destiny influence how we interpret and formulate our eschatology both as individuals and as church.

The interplay of socioeconomic, political, and cultural influences affects our worldview and evokes fears and hopes. Historical events such as wars, discoveries, and cataclysm inevitably influence and shape our eschatology. Our psyche and personal disposition also play a role. Individuals living through historical or ecological periods of turmoil and uncertainty, such as war, natural disasters, or epidemics, may fear the tenuous nature of their future and the frailty of existence. In turn, these fears might be tempered by hope and vision for a better future. Our own worldview and faith can also become templates for how we interpret the external events which we often see as confirming particular views that we might hold. As a result, individuals may view a massive earthquake or hurricane as harbingers of the end times, either shaping or confirming their particular eschatological perspective.

In addition to our social, historical, and cultural context, our access to information and knowledge also affects and shapes eschatology. First, as Tertullian so aptly noted, there is a divide between the academic and ecclesial perspective. The eschatological views of academics might be quite different than that of the laity. Second, access to information today is unprecedented. This means that the laity are exposed to a greater number of perspectives, some more sound than others. It also means that we, as a society, are more readily aware of world events than in other eras. Third, there is also a gap between theory and practice. A disconnect exists between orthodoxy and orthopraxis as noted by liberation theologies, which simply means that we don't always act in accordance to our beliefs. Thus, to understand Latino/a eschatology, we must go beyond the perspectives of theologians and include lay beliefs about the end times.

Popular Culture, Eschatologies, and Latinos/as

Latinos/as are as bound to subscribe to popular views and eschatologies as much as any other segment of the population. Hence, a Latino/a eschatology written by a theologian may not necessarily reflect the same views as those found in our churches. Recognizing this distinction avoids misrepresenting Latino/a beliefs regarding eschatology as identical to those of theologians. In addition, by examining both, it may be possible to identify underlying reasons and themes that are common to both. The beliefs of Latinos/as regarding eschatology often parallel those held by others who share their religious denomination or faith. Historical events, cultural worldviews, and scientific advances influence views of the end times, death, and the afterlife in popular culture. These influences often lead to an eschatological syncretism that blends biblical, theological, and popular perspectives into doctrines and beliefs (Jewett and Wallace 2008: 657).

Latino/a theology often uses the term "popular theology" to refer to the beliefs and practices used by the laity to express innate faith and resistance to external impositions. In current popular culture, biblical motifs often intertwine with apocalyptic scenarios derived from the media, quasi-scientific concepts, and technology to shape eschatology. While we may be able to differentiate between popular views and our faith, the two often converge as we interpret the Bible and current events. We interpret natural disasters as portents of the end times. Others use civil unrest and wars as barometers of the end. The rise of global media and the internet add to this frenzy by bringing news and sensationalism to our homes from the far reaches of the earth. Events that might have gone unnoticed in previous eras are now brought to us in vivid detail. Even as our knowledge of science and the cosmos expands, we become more keenly aware of our vulnerabilities, feeding into our apocalyptic imagination. In addition, we quickly identify controversial political figures and leaders with the Antichrist, epidemics with pestilence, and any perceived moral decay as a sign of the times.

Advances in science and technology, such as the development of nuclear weapons in the mid-twentieth century that made global annihilation possible, and the

discovery of asteroids that could collide with the earth, also shape eschatology. To some degree, these scientific discoveries not only made biblical scenarios of the earth consumed by fire or stars falling from the heaven plausible, but appeared to confirm them. Whether these scientific developments confirm biblical prophecy or are purely coincidental is a matter of personal faith and theological debate. However, they do play a role in popular eschatological views and heighten individual expectations of an imminent end.

Dispensation, the Rapture, and Evangelicals

Some popular views of eschatology also draw from specific approaches to biblical hermeneutics. Such approaches to scripture might be influenced to some extent by external factors, such as philosophical or theological perspectives that in turn might arise from the ethos of the times and cultures where they are born. Dispensationalism, for instance, shapes the eschatology of many conservative and evangelical Christians, and in turn, also influences the eschatology of many Latino/a evangelical congregations. Originating in the nineteenth century with John Nelson Darby and the Plymouth Brethren movement in Britain, it was promulgated in the US by the Scofield Bible's notations and commentaries. While Dispensationalism has a particular hermeneutical approach to scripture, it did not emerge in a cultural vacuum. The rise of the industrial era, scientific discoveries, politics, and better tools for disseminating ideas all played a role. These factors combined with various political upheavals in Europe to lead to a resurgence of interest in prophecy and a desire for greater certainty. Recently, books by Hal Lindsey and Tim La Hayes' "Left Behind" series brought Dispensationalism to a broader mainstream audience.

Dispensationalists believe that history consists of epochs divided into different "dispensations" of God's grace and use these dispensations to interpret the Bible and human history. Each dispensation marks a different covenant or way in which God interacts with humanity, judges, and dispenses grace. Dispensationalists tend to take more literal views of scripture and prophecies, using them to predict the future and make sense of current events. Dispensationalist eschatology tends to be coupled with Millennialism, the belief that Christ will reign on earth for a thousand years before God's final judgment and destruction of the earth. Preceding the millennium, the Antichrist, a political figure in league with the devil, will obtain widespread power, persecuting Christians and culminating in the battle at Megiddo (Armageddon or Mount of Megiddo). Another popular concept related to Dispensationalism and Millennialism is the Rapture, a reference to biblical passages about believers "being caught up in the clouds" to meet the returning Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Many believe that true Christians will be "snatched up" or "raptured" and taken to heaven before the rule of the Antichrist, sparing them from persecution during the Great Tribulation.

Dispensationalist and Millennialist tenets, such as the Rapture, recently entered mainstream culture through books such as the “Left Behind” series. Robert G. Clouse argues that the attraction of such books extends beyond fundamentalist evangelicals due, in part, to the accessible, popular language in which the books are written (Clouse 2008: 274). To some extent, these books also reflect prevailing cultural notions and archetypes. They also simplify the struggle of good and evil, which is a common theme in popular movies and even Disney cartoons (Clouse 2008: 22–3). In an era of complexity, general anxiety, and moral ambiguities, people are drawn to these clear-cut paradigms and seek the security of a clear road map into the future.

Naturally, a faith community’s eschatology affects its actions and its hermeneutics. History is full of examples of mass suicides, violence, and hysteria associated with particular eschatological expectations. On a less dramatic scale, eschatology also affects our everyday actions and social conscience. While not necessarily a direct cause of a particular tenet, popular eschatological interpretations can justify particular world-views that negatively affect Latino/a Christians. There is an eisogesis in which we correlate world events, groups, or individuals with our own eschatological perspective, often to justify our own paranoia and expectations. In addition, these views can lead to fatalism or escapism preventing us from acting to change current social structures and injustices.

Death, zombies, and the afterlife

Humans are predisposed to believe that some aspect of our experience transcends death, whether as a disembodied spirit, as a reincarnated soul, or simply in the legacy we pass on to other generations. Our fascination with what happens after death has not waned in spite of modern science. A quick survey of television programming will reveal a number of popular shows devoted to paranormal phenomenon, ghost hunters, and psychics. Similarly, current fascination with a zombie apocalypse collapses eschatological notions of the end of the world with death. While zombie apocalypses are the result of horror films and shows, a quick survey of the internet shows a number of sites, stories, and reality shows where people argue that such an event could happen.

Shifts in our culture also influence our views of heaven and hell. As our cosmology shifted, so did our view of heaven as located in the sky above with hell below. Whether we believe in heaven as a literal place of eternal bliss and hell as a fiery eternal punishment or not, their location has moved. Now we are more apt to understand heaven or hell as inhabiting a different plane of existence, either beyond our universe or coexisting with it. Even our notions of what constitutes heaven and hell are different, not necessarily as literal and tied to physical existence. For instance, some offer psychological interpretations of hell as emotional anguish and heaven as serenity. Regardless of whether we adhere to them or not, all of these beliefs affect us to some extent.

Latinos/as and popular eschatologies

Latinos/as are not exempt from cultural influences and popular eschatologies. As our world shrinks through technology and as greater cultural interaction occurs, a certain degree of syncretism seeps into all cultures. In some churches individuals have confided in me that they believe in reincarnation or ghosts, or consult mediums. As Latinos/as, syncretism is not alien to our cultural expressions. Christians always mingled their faith with cultural and popular expressions. Thus, Latinos/as may not see a conflict between the Christian faith and beliefs emerging from popular culture. After all, we celebrate *el Día de los Muertos*, make offerings to the departed, and share ghost stories of *la llorona* (the weeping woman).

In particular, *el Día de los Muertos*, a Mexican celebration that has spread to other communities, best exemplifies how syncretism and popular practice affect our eschatology. The celebration, which occurs from October 31 to November 2, coincides with both the Christian traditions of All Saints' and All Souls' Days and the Aztec traditions related to the Goddess Mictecacihuatl, queen of the underworld and afterlife. The celebration includes offerings to the dead, visits to their graves, remembrance, and the preparation of altars honoring those who have died. Such celebrations illustrate the inevitability of death and the eschatological hope that life continues in some form beyond our death. These celebrations to some extent indicate an innate cultural belief in the continuation of life after death.

Latino/a Eschatological Themes

Latino/a theologians recognize the contextual nature of all theology, including their own. Hence, they try to articulate and interpret what is at the heart of the faith and practices of Latino/as. While not necessarily identical to the faith and practices of the people, Latino/a theologies emerge from them. The contextual and concrete nature of Latino/a theologies resists essentialist categories. When I write of themes in Latino/a eschatology, I simply offer a rubric for navigating Latino/a eschatological thought, and not a set classification.

Eschatologies are by nature teleological and tend to have a vector quality to them. This is to be expected, since eschatology has a historical trajectory rooted in the promises of the past, critiquing our present, and pointing to the future. Thus, that a similar tendency can be found in Latino/a eschatologies is not surprising. In analyzing the leading Latino/a eschatologies, salient themes emerge with a common trajectory. The same is true for popular eschatological views shared by Latinos/as. All of these themes connect with and intersect one another following the shared trajectory of a present struggle with oppression, and of the hope of overcoming that oppression and creating a better future. Ultimately, human beings are temporal in nature, defined by our trajectory in time. Faced with dire circumstances, our own frailty, and the uncertainty of the future, hope for the grace of a better tomorrow is what allows us to carry on.

Critiquing, fighting, and overcoming oppression

Adversity, whether it is illness, death, poverty, or oppression, makes us look toward tomorrow. According to biblical scholars, most of the Bible's apocalyptic writing came during times of adversity, exile, oppression, or persecution. These books critiqued the social structures of the day and offered hope that God would destroy them and replace them with something better. Eschatology offers a critique of present circumstances – things are not what they ought to be – and offers us hope for the future grounded in God. Latino/a eschatology, whether lay or theological, would yield a similar conclusion.

Most Latinos/as face oppression in some form. It might be economic or political oppression. It can take the form of racism and discrimination. Whether currently or in the past, most Latinos/as struggle against some form of systemic adversity that defines their existence. Hence, they hope for a better future. For some, this future may not seem attainable in the present socioeconomic structures. Thus, their hope turns toward a future time when they will be freed from these structures. Inherent in this hope are a critique of their present circumstances and a vision of what the future should be like.

The inherent critique of the present and hope for the future is present in both lay and theological eschatologies, even if it takes different forms. A Latino/a evangelical who believes we are living in the end times may think moral decay has led to a corrupt and sinful society. She or he may fight against evils in society and hope to transcend the coming tribulation by the Rapture. A theologian from a mainline congregation may write about current structural evils that need to be radically transformed or eradicated by God working through us. The beliefs may be diametrically opposed in terms of how they interpret circumstances and envision the future. Yet both offer a critique of current circumstances and a desire to transcend them.

Latino/a theologians, as other liberation theologians, critique oppression as structural and call us to engage in a liberative praxis that transforms society. In *Mañana*, Justo González argues that Latinos/as are a *mañana* people, oriented toward the future. This does not mean, he argues, that Latinos/as necessarily do not live in the present or lazily put off action, but that they are future-oriented because of the adversity of the present. Christianity contrasts the present structures to God's Kingdom, where structural oppressions and injustice are eliminated. Hence, "*Mañana* is more than 'tomorrow.' It is a radical questioning of today" (González 1990: 164). The eschatological vision of God's ideal judges the present, seeing what ought to be and questioning why it is not.

However, this futuristic orientation has risks. It may lead to inaction and complacency. One could embrace a futuristic hope that, while critical of present structures, is escapist, seeing society as morally bankrupt and evil, to be shunned. Thus, one might withdraw from society as much as possible, awaiting liberation in death, the Rapture, or Christ's second coming. Another might embrace a fatalistic attitude regarding their ability to change the current system and simply wait for divine deliverance. Whether one believes in a particular eschatology does not necessarily determine one's actions. A Pentecostal evangelical, rather than passively waiting for the Rapture, might

choose to fight social evil by feeding the hungry, marching for immigration reform, or taking action to stop gang violence. A theologian might write about structural evils, but never leave the safety of the classroom.

Often, passive or spiritualized eschatologies result from an inherent dualism that contrasts the material and the spiritual – a form of contemporary Docetism, which González rejects (González 1990: 165). Dualistic beliefs create a hierarchy where the material world is evil and inferior to the spiritual, ignoring the fact that both are God's creation. Combined with eschatology, dualism becomes dangerous, not simply because of a tendency to inaction, but because it can promote further exploitation of the environment and condone oppression of anything associated with the material world. Such views also can ignore the needs of our embodied existence, often worsened by injustice and structural forms of oppression.

Confronting oppression as an eschatological demand

Confronting social and structural evils is a common thread in Latino/a theologies, often with eschatological undertones. In *Galilean Journey*, Virgilio Elizondo argues that the Latino/a experience is defined by a struggle for survival and liberation. Elizondo uses Jesus' journey to Jerusalem as a call for confronting structural oppression. In Jerusalem, a symbol of structural power, Jesus confronts the establishment and exposes its divisive, oppressive, and exploitative nature. However, this confrontation comes with a prize. Jesus is betrayed, abandoned, and executed for subverting the status quo (Elizondo 1983: 67–78). Elizondo refers to this confrontation as the Jerusalem Principle, and calls us to confront the establishment by revealing, through nonviolent means, the violence, racism, and oppression inherent in it (Elizondo 1983: 113).

However, the sacrifice required in confronting structural oppression and injustice can only be made because of our eschatological hope. Elizondo points to the resurrection as the source of the hope that love and life will overcome hatred and death (Elizondo 1983: 115). The resurrection is a symbol of hope that serves both as God's judgment upon oppressive structures and as the affirmation of the ultimate triumph over them. Elizondo does not speak specifically as to the nature of the resurrection, whether it is personal, communal, bodily, or spiritual. Instead, he speaks of the new life evoked by the resurrection and the hope of our ultimate triumph over oppression and violence by the affirmation of life.

God's reign

La lucha, the day-to-day struggle of Latinas against oppression, violence, and dehumanization, in Ada María Isasi-Díaz's *mujerista* theology offers a similar critique grounded in eschatological hope. This hope comes from what Isasi-Díaz calls the "kingdom," a shared communal hope for equality that is in contrast to the imagery of power

conveyed by the term kingdom. "Kin-dom" offers an alternative image of inclusion and family, where we all are kin to one another. In such a kin-dom, we are all sisters and brothers, children of God to be treated with dignity and love. Rather than exclusion, marginalization, and suffering, God's kin-dom provides us with a place where we all belong (Isasi-Díaz 1996: 53). A similar theme can be found in Elizondo, where *mestizaje* serves as both as a critique racial exclusion and the eschatological hope for the eradication of racial barriers and oppression, leading to a more inclusive community (Elizondo 1983:7–16).

The theme of God's kin-dom or God's reign is central to many Latino/a theologies and their eschatological understanding. The New Testament speaks about God's reign as having a not-yet character. The ideals preached by Jesus, as well as his action, foreshadow God's expectations for humanity, which are yet to be fulfilled. We are called to live in accordance with these principles of justice, love, and forgiveness, and to the extent that we do, they fulfill God's reign, but only in part. However, these principles serve as critique of our current oppressive structures, a foreshadowing of what could be, and the hope that drives our present struggle against oppression and hatred.

Latino/a theologies' critique of the present relies on a moral imperative of what "ought to be," defined by the characteristics of God's reign and liberation from all forms of oppressive structures. Jesus' message presents us with more than a promise for the future for which we await; it presents us with a demand for us to act in the present in order to transform it into a particular future. Eschatology is the fulfillment of a promise, a seed planted in humanity that if nourished by our actions can one day bear fruit.

Eschatological hope and the future

Hope is inherent in Latino/a theologies and eschatology, even though it might not be explicit. Given some of the circumstances faced by many Latinos/as, hope is essential to their liberative praxis and vision of the future. However, this is not necessarily a passive hope. Hope empowers and emboldens us to act by believing that society can be transformed. Eschatology is essential to this hope, whether it is the promise of a future transformed by God's power or of one transformed through our actions. Without hope, our theology would be nihilistic and our struggle in vain.

To some extent, Latino/a theologies are similar to Jürgen Moltmann's theology of hope, but arguably different too. Eschatological hope is critical to the development of theology for Moltmann and Latino/a theologians. In *Theology of Hope*, Moltmann argues that all theology must begin with eschatology, which is the teleological aim of faith and the hope for a future that is not yet. According to Moltmann:

In actual fact, however, eschatology means the doctrine of the Christian hope, which embraces both the object hoped for and also the hope inspired by it. From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present. (Moltmann 1993: 16)

Latino/a theologies are true to Moltmann's premise. Eschatological hope and its inherent critique of the present are central to the development of Latino/a theology and, as is the case for Moltmann, the promise of God's Kingdom serves as a critical teleological locus. The resurrection, for instance, is critical to our hope and to empowering us to act in the midst of adversity, according to Elizondo. For González, the ideals of the Kingdom of God preached by Jesus serve both as our eschatological vision for the future and as a critique of the present. Latino/a theologies are similar to Moltmann's theology in arguing that the future empowers us to critique and act in the present.

However, significant differences exist between Latino/a eschatological hope and Moltmann's theology. Just as liberation theologies appropriate some Marxist themes, Moltmann also draws from Marxist thinkers, in particular Ernst Bloch and Theodor Adorno. However, while both argue in favor of a liberative praxis, Moltmann does not single out poverty, race, or other forms as socioeconomic oppressions. Instead, he argues in favor of liberation for all from sin – the oppressed and oppressors alike. For Latino/a theologians, eschatological hope takes on more concrete dimensions in critiquing the present and calling for transformative action. Moltmann's eschatology is more universal, abstract, and theoretical.

In Moltmann's, eschatological hope leads us to critique sin and empowers both our faith and our ability to act out of love for others. However, Latino/a theologies are more concrete, criticizing sin not as an abstract notion, but as oppressive socioeconomic structures, marginalization, and violence. Moltmann's theology also places more emphasis on God as the principal agent in history, while Latino/a theologians place greater emphasis on human action to bring forth transformative change. This does not mean that Latinos/as do not see God as an agent of change, but rather that God evokes this change through us and works with us as we critique, confront, and transform society.⁴

Whether eschatological or otherwise, hope empowers us to act. Hope is not illusory; it is the lure of the future through which God calls us to transform the world and the faith that with God's grace we can. Hope enables us to become agents of history rather than the objects of oppression. To struggle without any hope of transforming society or of an ultimate vindication is meaningless, leading us to resignation. Without hope our theology would be nihilistic. This does not mean that our hope is necessarily certain or focused on a specific outcome. Our hope may simply be to alleviate our suffering or to create a better world for posterity. Regardless, hope is what enables us to critique and subvert the present, creating a pathway for a better future.⁵ As such, hope, in particular, is a primary component of Latino/a theology and foundational to its eschatology.

Community as a catalyst for hope

The teleological vision of the future that serves as a catalyst for hope in Latino/a theologies takes on various forms: the cosmic race that emerges from *mestizaje* in Elizondo, the ideals of God's Kingdom in González, or the kin-dom of God in Isasi-Díaz. However, they

share a common notion: God's reign subverts hierarchical structures of dominance in favor of an inclusive community defined by love and empowerment. The *telos* or goal of Latino/a eschatology is the creation of a new community as defined by God's reign. Thus, eschatology is not necessarily about transcending the world, but about transforming it. It is not about liberating us from the world, but about us liberating the world from evil and oppressive structures.

Latino/a eschatology is not solely about personal salvation, but about social transformation that establishes the reign or kin-dom of God. However, as far as the individual participates in a community, transformation occurs in both. Orlando Espín, for instance, argues that our hope as Christians finds its roots in God's grace, made manifest in the image of the God who is love and who calls us to live out this image both individually and communally. According to Espín, God's grace "calls and moves us to further our humanization," which we accomplish by opening ourselves both to God's liberating, unconditional love and to the struggle for justice evoked by that love (Espín 2014: 162–3).

Latino/a eschatology envisions a community defined by love and inclusivity. In Isasi-Díaz's kin-dom, we are family, God's family. Isasi-Díaz chooses the term "kin-dom" to avoid the sexist connotations of "king," but also to evoke the hope of a time where all are considered sisters and brothers, our kin (Isasi-Díaz 1996: 125). Her vision of such an existence to some extent parallel's Elizondo's notion of the cosmic race, where the mixture of races make it more difficult to exclude some from our common humanity. However, she adds to Elizondo's concept of *mestizaje* by including the term *mulatez*, the mixture of African and European people. In addition, her *mujerista* theology goes beyond the struggle against racial marginalization, to include gender. This kin-dom is not an otherworldly reality to come at the end of our existence. God's kin-dom has a locus in history; it occurs in this world and within human history (Isasi-Díaz 1996: 117). As such, the goal of eschatology is the disruption of oppressive structures and the transformation of society into an inclusive community.

Eschatology and the transformation of society as a communal enterprise are not limited to Catholic Latino/a theologians. In drafting an evangelical social spirituality, Eldín Villafañe turns to eschatology as the primary framework of New Testament theology, evidenced by the Reign of God that breaks into history (Villafañe 1995: 217). The Reign of God, inaugurated by Jesus, continues through the work of the Spirit in us and the church. Like other Latino/a theologians, Villafañe uses God's Reign both to critique and to call us to resist present structures of evil, which include hate, hostility, and injustice. However, this is not solely a personal struggle, but also a communal one. As Villafañe writes:

The tendency of many is to see this struggle too individualistically and not see that spiritual warfare must correspond with the geography of evil – the sinful and evil structures of society. The Evangelical Church must see itself not only as a *locus* for personal liberation, but also as a *locus* for social liberation. (Villafañe 1995: 219)

While not rejecting a personal dimension and a hope for the return of Christ, Villafañe argues that our eschatological hope in God's Reign has a historical component that requires an active struggle toward transforming society.

Overcoming death

The Hebrew Bible does not provide many insights into life after death, particularly for the individual. It is concerned to a greater extent with the collective immortality of a people, often as preserved by remembrance and the continuation of one's legacy through one's descendent (Genesis 25:8). Other instances suggest that life ceases at death (Genesis 3:19; Job 10:9; Isaiah 38:18–19) or make reference to a shadowy existence in Sheol, which is often associated with hell. Although some passages do speak of deliverance from death (Psalms 16:10) or the survival of the soul (1 Samuel. 28:8–15), they are not as prevalent. By the time that Christianity emerges, Jewish beliefs vary on the topic. In Christianity the dominant belief is in the resurrection. However, some passages appear to suggest the immortality of the soul (Philippians 1:21–4) or that upon death we enter paradise (Luke 23:43). Others passages suggest that the soul will sleep until the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:51–2; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–14).⁶

Although most Christians, including Latinos/as, tend to believe in some form of personal existence that transcends death, many theologians shy away from explicitly addressing the topic. In fact, as Luis Rivera-Pagan points out, Western-educated theologians gravitate more toward a “chilastic vision” than to the affirmations of life everlasting and a bodily resurrection. Even Karl Barth, he adds, rejects any possible existence beyond our finite mortal life (Rivera-Pagan 2004: 130). Latino/a theologians tend to emphasize the historical and social import of eschatology rather than individual, personal survival beyond death.

In some respects, for Latino/a theologians overcoming death is critical to eschatological hope, even for the individual. The question is whether such overcoming of death is as an individual subjective reality that transcends our own mortality or some other form of non-subjective survival. In the sense that our contributions and actions toward the establishment of the Reign of God impact our community, it is possible to say that most Latino/a theologians would concur that we can transcend suffering and death, at least as part of a community.

To know that our actions matter to our future and contribute toward a future reality can be a source of hope. To be an agent of history who can shape history or to be remembered by our community after we die provides us with a sense of objective immortality. Collectively, as part of a community, the survival and betterment of our community through our actions can also contribute to that hope. Even knowing that our legacy and our agency will be continued by others can provide us with a level of hope that our subjective and moral agency, our praxis, has a vector quality that continues its impact in the future. As I argue in *Teología: An Introduction to Hispanic Theology*, the belief in the resurrection affirms that our lives, hopes, and dreams have value. Thus, although we

might die, we continue to live in God and in the lives of those who continue our work (Pedraja 2004: 201).

However, is some form of objective immortality or legacy sufficient to justify suffering and death? Latinos/as, who are often objects of history, exploited and victimized, thrust into historical obscurity, may find little comfort in such forms of immortality. As Moltmann argues, God's justice requires some form of vindication that allows the correction of injustices.⁷ Although our subjective agency may continue through others or God's ongoing work, we would not experience the satisfaction of overcoming our suffering, only the hope that the suffering of others would end. While hope for social transformation might be sufficient to empower our actions, faith in Jesus' resurrection for most Christians implies an expectation and hope that we will personally somehow transcend death. Most Latinos/as share this hope to some extent, but whether the individual will transcend death is not explicit in the works of Latino/a theologians. Even when Elizondo writes about the resurrection, the emphasis is on God's affirmation of life and vindication of human suffering, not on individuals per se.

The problem might be easier to resolve if we moved beyond modern individualism and false dichotomies. Many cultures, as well as philosophers and theologians, reject the subject-object dichotomy. Even the Cartesian notions of the detached, solitary, individual thinker, which affected Western philosophy, are less prevalent in postmodern philosophies that view reality as both fluid and interconnected. The same is true in modern physics, particularly in relativity and quantum mechanics, which blur the boundaries between matter, energy, and subjectivity. Even Eastern philosophies, such as Buddhism, understand all things to be interconnected and the self to be simply an illusion. We are one with God. Thus, I will contend that it may be possible for some aspect of our subjective agency to transcend death.

Scriptures indicate that humanity is created in God's image. In creation, God's Spirit (*Ruah*) breathed life into us and abides in us now (Genesis 2:1). The New Testament also speaks of being one with God (John 15:5; 1 Corinthians 12:13). Christian mystics, such as Meister Eckhart and Bernard of Clairvaux, wrote about the mystical union. In celebrating the Eucharist or Communion, we speak of being one body partaking of the body and blood of Christ. Our faith binds us with the life of God and Jesus' resurrection in ways that transcend our own notions of the individual. As we participate in God's love, we continue to participate beyond the finite terminus of death (Romans 8:38–9). To quote the words of St Augustine, "God is closer to us than we are to ourselves." Our finite existence is an instantiation of the divine, experienced as separate but unable to exist apart from God or in isolation (Acts 17:27–8). As our actions conform to God's will, we participate in God's Reign. As the words of the Lord's Prayer affirm: "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."⁸

If we move away from dualistic and individualistic notions of the self, it is clear no contradiction exists in the stance of Latino/a theologies that believe in a communal eschatological hope and Christian faith in the resurrection. Although our finite existence may end, we continue to participate in God's continual creative activity, not simply as an objective datum of experience or an isolated detached spirit, but as part of God's life. In

death, we transcend the dichotomies of object and subject. In God, we are neither subject nor object, but at one with God. Thus, all that we are, both subjectively and objectively, transcends death in God. At the same time, by recognizing that we are not isolated individuals, we can understand the imperatives that call us to love our neighbors as ourselves, to critique oppressive structures, and to seek to establish the community of God's kin-dom.

The notion of being at one with God also affects concepts of heaven and hell. Biblical imagery of hell often involves being left out, cast out, or separated from God (Matthew 8:12, 22:13), while heaven consist of dwelling with God (Luke 23:4; John 14:2).⁹ In most Latino/a eschatologies, heaven and hell are defined in terms of our relationship to God, not as particular locations. Both can exist within history. Hell is a present reality for Latinos/as and others who suffer marginalization and oppression. In the same manner, heaven exists as we participate in God's Reign or kin-dom today as much as in the future. In the words of Thoreau, "Heaven is under our feet as well as over our heads." Both realities coexist in the present and in the future defined by our relation to God and our actions, either in accordance with God's will or in rebellion. However, judgment is real; not as a condemnation into eternal fire, which I believe is contrary to God's love, but as a judgment against actions and structures that are contrary to God's love. Sin separates us from God's love; God's grace reconciles us by creating a new possibility for being in spite of our sin.¹⁰

Eschatology as Transformative

Eschatology, particularly as envisioned by Latino/a theology, can transform us and society. In the popular imagination, eschatology often evokes fear and visions of cataclysm, suffering, and ultimately death. However, as stated at the outset, eschatology is not about the end of history, but about its transformation. This transformation occurs in a variety of ways, both individually and structurally. Eschatology critiques present structures and points us to what could and should be. It offers us hope in the present and faith in the future. As such, eschatology is about God's ongoing creative power.

One of the ways that eschatology critiques current structures and transforms society is by revealing what truly matters. Most people are comforted by the description of the New Jerusalem at the end of the book of Revelation as a vision of God's ultimate glory. However, I will argue they miss an important point. The subversive message of the New Testament reverses the structures of society – the last will be first and those who suffer under oppressive structures will be free and exalted. God's love reverses our values and provides us with proper perspective. The New Jerusalem also provides us with the proper perspective, not one of God's glory and riches. Rather, precious metals and stones that we value are shown for what they are – building material used to for walls and roads. The New Jerusalem is not so much about God's glory and power as about transforming our perspective and value structure.

Eschatology liberates us from the things that hold power over us and the things that we fear. It liberates us by transforming the way we see the world, by critiquing structures of power and wealth conceived by our sin, and empowering us to act, knowing that not

even death has power over us. In *Mañana*, González speaks of life in the Spirit not as a Gnostic detachment from this world that degrades the material as inferior, but as a transformation that contrasts “worldly” structures and values with those who live in accordance with God’s Spirit (González 1990: 157–63). This contrast serves as the foundation for his eschatology, where God’s Reign is not an otherworldly spiritual reality, but a present force shaping and transforming human history (González, pp. 164–7). I use this same contrast to understand our participation in the resurrection as a new reality that transforms our bodily reality from a context defined by sin and death to one defined by love and life in accordance with God’s Spirit (Pedraja 2004: 200). God’s rejection of death as the finality of human experience transforms us and empowers us to act.

Eschatology transforms not only us, but also the very structures of society. The ultimate hope of eschatology is that structures of sin, death, and oppression that dehumanize us will one day be transformed by God. Eschatology is not about the end of the universe or about our death per se, but about the end of sinful, oppressive, and destructive forces. Eschatology does not condemn creation as inferior, flawed, or corrupted. Rather, it condemns the evil that exists in it, which is our creation. The hope of eschatology is the transformation of all creation, freed from these structures that were not intended by God (Romans 8:21–2). These structures of death that humanity has created not only destroy us, but wreak havoc upon our ecosystem as our sin literally pollutes all of creation.

Conclusion

While there are few chapters or sections on eschatology in the works of most Latino/a theologians, eschatological hope serves as the underpinning of most of these works to some extent. Eschatology is inherent in the critique of oppressive structures and marginalization, as well as the resistance to these forces. In envisioning a different reality than the present, Latino/a theology offers us an eschatology, a vector that points us to an end (a *telos*) defined by God that is inclusive and grounded in love.

While things fall apart when the center does not hold in Yeats’ eschatological poem “The Second Coming,” this is not necessarily a bad thing for those of us who live in the margins of society. Ultimately, eschatology critiques those structures we hold as central to our society – dominant and oppressive powers around which the world revolves. In providing an alternative vision and goal, eschatology frees us to act and to transform society, ultimately empowering us to make possible the overcoming of evil and death, which in the end are the ones that are cast into the fire (Revelation 20:14).

Notes

- 1 Paul Tillich often argues that the divine destroys in order to create, while the demonic simply destroys for the sake of destruction, eventually consuming itself (Tillich 1957: 14–16).
- 2 I elaborate this point in “Eschatology” (Pedraja 2004: 114–15).

- 3 Orlando Costas argues this (Costas 1982: 4). I make a similar argument in Pedraja (2003: 11–26).
- 4 For instance, Orlando Espín writes: “U.S. Latino experience, in brief, is surely one of vanquishment, but also one of active hope in a good alternative from God” (Espín 1997: 26).
- 5 Orlando Espín provides an excellent perspective on the role of hope as subversive, the inherent risk, and empowerment of hope for our actions, in Espín (2014).
- 6 I address this topic in my chapter on eschatology in Pedraja (2002: 197–203).
- 7 This is addressed in Jürgen Moltmann’s essay “Is There Life After Death?” (Moltmann 2000).
- 8 I elaborate on the topic of God’s Kingdom in Pedraja (2004 :194–5; 1999: 117–18).
- 9 Even when Jesus speaks of Gehenna, a valley just outside of Jerusalem associated with the sacrifice of children to false gods and later with a place where the wicked are either purified or destroyed, the implication is of being cast out or excluded from God’s dwelling, often associated with Jerusalem.
- 10 I develop some of these argument regarding sin and reconciliation in Pedraja (2004: 156–7, 165–86).

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CHAPTER 14

Latino/a Ethics

María Teresa Dávila

To speak of Latino/a ethics as a distinct discipline is both impossible and disingenuous. As this volume shows, Latino/a theology is interdisciplinary in its methodology as well as justice-seeking in its epistemology. Therefore, whether we speak of systematic theology, ecclesiology, spirituality, liturgy, or any other theological discipline, we would be hard pressed to find a single Latino/a theologian who does not address matters of justice, inequality, marginalization, class, race, otherness, politics, or poverty, all typically understood to be at the heart of ethics proper. This offers ethicists within Latino/a theology an embarrassment of riches because in one way or another all Latino/a theologians consider how to bring about right relationship between persons, in community, with the environment, and with God in a broken world, from the particular perspective of the Hispanic experience. This chapter, however, is limited to the discussion of Latino/a ethics as a unique field. While incorporating key themes developed in other fields of Latino/a theology in a diversity of disciplines since the mid-1980s, the focus will be on their ethical import. The reader is encouraged to return to other chapters in this volume after reading this chapter on ethics to review how these themes and methodologies are reflected, echoed, developed, applied, implied, challenged, or reshaped among the other disciplines represented.

Grounded on the preferential option for the poor as our inheritance from Latin American liberation theology,¹ Latino/a theology seeks to express the theological insights of Latinos and Latinas in the United States. These insights reflect the particular challenges of life on the margins, as first- and subsequent-generation immigrants, often invisible, marked by economic hardship, political and cultural exclusion, and suspicion from those in the majority or who wield power in its varied forms. At the same time these insights reflect a lived faith, communal spirit, deeply held traditions, language and

celebrations, unceasing effort, and will to achieve concomitant with Latino/a life. Key themes such as *mestizaje*, *la lucha*, *teología en conjunto*, *acompañamiento*, and *dignidad*² became the pioneering expressions of theologians and ethicists daringly proposing to the theological academy that the Hispanic experience is a valid, important, and fruitful context for theological reflection and production. This chapter begins with a presentation of the central figures that have helped shape the area of Latino/a ethics and their main contributions to the field, followed by a more detailed proposal of current concerns for this author. Of note in this section are two key dimensions of the methodology of Latino/a ethics: ecumenicity and *en conjunto*. First, while this chapter only offers a sample of the rich and expanding field of Latino/a ethics, the concepts and authors highlighted span a range of Christian traditions: Baptist, Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, Humanist, and Evangelical, among others. Latino/a theology and ethics develop throughout the decades in conversations that cross denominational borders in order to build theology that can relevantly speak *from* and *to* the Latino/a experience. Second, the material presented here is characterized by a practice of doing theology as an active participation in diverse Hispanic communities, as well as relationships and conversations among theologians from various disciplines and traditions, recognizing that theology is a collaborative effort. Both of these elements are reflected in the last section of the chapter, discussing new and emerging voices and themes in Latino/a ethics. Throughout these discussions attentiveness to narratives – historical and present, narratives of oppression and liberation, of exclusion and inclusion, of powerlessness and empowerment, of accompaniment and solidarity and their role in disrupting injustice toward the building of right relationships among the human family, surfaces as a key methodology for Latino/a ethics.

Historical Developments

The publication in 1983 of *Galilean Journey: The Mexican American Promise*, by Roman Catholic priest Virgilio Elizondo, marks a decisive moment in the development of Latino/a theology. Using particular scholarly perspectives on Jesus' Galilean identity as that of being marginalized in an empire, politically unimportant, economically, culturally, and religiously disempowered, Elizondo opened the possibility for the Hispanic experience to speak theologically to the human quest for liberation. Specifically, his treatment of the concept of *mestizaje* brings to life a highly complex reading of Hispanic reality: *mestizaje*, as the violent history of conquest and domination in the Americas (beginning with the arrival of the Europeans in the fifteenth century) that occasioned the coming together of European, Amerindian, and African peoples, offers a special kinship with Jesus as marginalized in his own historical context, but also as bringing to himself the promise of new realities that resist and challenge the status quo, confront the powers, and seek radical unity among the human family and with God. The significance of Elizondo's contribution to the field of ethics cannot be overstated. Through his reconceptualizing of *mestizaje* – a term originally associated with derogatory and violent attitudes toward people of mixed

descent – into one of cosmic identification with the new humanity in Christ and the liberation and redemption this represents, Elizondo drew from Hispanic experience – even our past history of violent conquest – tools for envisioning a more just, inclusive, and liberating way of being in the world. This, even or especially when that world continually rejects and marginalizes that which it constitutes as “other” or inferior.

In *Dignidad: Ethics Through Hispanic Eyes*, Puerto Rican ethicist Ismael García argues for an Hispanic ethics of “recognition and care,” grounding his discussion of justice and the common good on an anthropology that acknowledges the interdependent nature of human beings. In García’s development of the term, *dignidad* “reflects the two sides of acknowledging the image of God in every human being, both upholding the dignity inherent in every [person] including the self, and critically denouncing the places where human dignity comes under threat or attack” (Dávila 2001 1: 75). *Dignidad* draws from Latino life in the US in its context of relationships, building the common good of those within the Hispanic community and throughout the nation, envisioning a social ethic where threats to the life and dignity of any one person or group are confronted by communities formed in an ethic of recognition and care. García offers *dignidad* as a counterbalance to excessive emphasis on individual rights in traditional Western notions of justice and the common good (García 1997: 44, 50). He does this while at the same time trying to safeguard against the problem of parochialism that can set in when the common good is defined strictly on the basis of a particular community’s sense of identity over against the larger society. He advocates for a permeability of group boundaries where groups can interact with each other and offer the best of their values in the public square for the protection of the rights of all – including those who traditionally have been on the margins within Hispanic communities, such as sexual and gender minorities or those considered outsiders (García 1997: 58–9). *Dignidad* and an ethic of recognition and care contribute to the building and defining of the good, in ways that correct original notions of rights and justice in the nation that have been corrupted throughout history by an ideology of hyper-individualism, consumerism, and advancement of the self at the expense of the community.

While García develops the concept of *dignidad* from his Baptist tradition, Eldín Villafañe offers a Pentecostal social ethic grounded in the Hispanic Pentecostal experience in the barrios and communities, for whom the movement of the Spirit of God is the central lens through which to understand life in the family, the community, and the greater society. In *The Liberating Spirit: Toward an Hispanic American Pentecostal Social Ethic*, Villafañe lifts up the validity of Hispanic Pentecostal religious experience as locus for a social ethic valid not just for Pentecostals in the US, but for mainline Christians as well. Villafañe combines obedience to the Spirit’s movement – a key element of Pentecostal tradition – with radical challenges to social ethics that in his judgment have been compromised by or assimilated into mainstream secular culture and ideologies. Instead of focusing ethics as an expression of a personal or individual relationship with Jesus, Villafañe argues for a “social spirituality,” recognizing the communal nature of the Spirit in the world (Villafañe 1992: 194). His discussion on a social spirituality leads to three ethical norms stemming from the community’s attention to the Spirit’s activity in

history: (1) the Spirit's historical project leads to the challenge to participate in the Reign of God in history; (2) the Spirit's power leads to the challenge to confront structures of sin and evil; and (3) the Spirit's charismatic empowerment leads to the challenge to fulfill the prophetic and vocational role of "baptism in the Spirit" (Villafañe 1992:195). Villafañe presents both an internal and an external challenge to Pentecostal churches to be more authentic in their public role, in transforming society according to the expectations of the Reign of God and the participation in the power of the Spirit. This moves away from the emphasis on *culto* or worship, which he feels takes up most of the energies of Pentecostal faithful, to recognize every dimension of life, especially the social and political, as under God's rule and part of the Spirit's mission for transformation toward right relation and justice (Villafañe 1992: 200–5).

To the concepts of *mestizaje* and *dignidad* we add *lo cotidiano* and *la lucha*. The everyday life of communities or groups living in exclusion and marginalization as the places where the divine and its justice are revealed, and the struggle for justice and loving relations that accompanies that life, are at the heart of Ada María Isasi Díaz's work: "For Ada María Isasi Díaz, *mujerista*³ theology and ethics is composed of a number of guidelines derived from the daily experience of survival of Latinas in the United States. Her methodology encounter[s] theology, ecclesiology, and ethics from the perspective and through the lens of the lives of the Latina women with whom she works" (Dávila 2011: 76). *Lo cotidiano* reflects Latinas' way of knowing that privileges their lived realities and that of other marginalized: realities of class, racial, and gender oppression, of political invisibility or persecution, or lack of access to those tools of life that the dominant group has come to take for granted such as education, housing, food, adequate medical care, or political influence. But in *lo cotidiano* this epistemological task of knowing the lives of the poor would not be complete without its accompanying liberative principle that seeks, on a daily basis, to understand the dynamics and systemic injustices that lead to daily experiences of suffering, to improve lives, fight for justice, and enact the "Kin-dom" in the historical now. *Lo cotidiano*, then, is both epistemological process and praxis for liberation as experienced and desired by the poor (Isasi-Díaz 1996: 68-71).

La lucha or *en la lucha* is the particular praxiological dimension stemming from a new vision of reality offered by attention to *lo cotidiano*. For Isasi-Díaz,

the centrality of struggle as a constitutive element of the everyday lives of Latinas, of Latinas' self-construction, can be understood and grasped only against a background of oppression due to specific historical injustices that are the cause of great suffering. But in listening carefully to grassroots Latinas, one finds that what locates us in life is not suffering but *la lucha* to survive. (Isasi-Díaz 2004: 178)⁴

The everyday experience of Hispanics in the US, and of so many countless marginalized peoples in the world, is the continual struggle against the forces of oppression and exclusion and for liberation within history. *Lo cotidiano* and *la lucha* contribute the particular perspective that it is Latinas and other poor themselves who are defining

what liberation looks like in their context. Informed by their religious practices, their understanding of creation and God's love, salvation in Jesus Christ and the Spirit working within history, *lo cotidiano* and *la lucha* express the historical goals and hopes of the people as they have come to define them, rather than acquiescing to a vision of the good life developed and imposed by dominant ideologies of power. As such, liberation within *lo cotidiano* is worked as a personal goal and also within communities, taking ownership of our moral agency, as actors within our own histories, shaping the political, social, religious, and cultural spaces in which liberation from oppression and marginalization is worked out (Isasi-Díaz 2004: ch. 5).

This introductory discussion of some figures and concepts in Latino/a ethics ends with the work of Miguel De La Torre.⁵ An ethicist of Cuban descent and in the Baptist tradition, De La Torre's prolific publications witness to the flourishing of Latino/a ethics in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Two particularly salient publications in De La Torre's corpus are *Doing Christian Ethics from the Margins* (2004) and *Latina/o Social Ethics: Moving Beyond Eurocentric Moral Thinking* (2010). In both these volumes De La Torre seeks to challenge normative understandings of Christian ethics as they were developed in the twentieth century and as a result of the history of mainly Western Christianity. He asks, and posits possibilities for, how ethics reflective of the gospel message of salvation in history through Christ's solidarity in the cross would look if formulated from the experiences and concerns of the poor and marginalized. What surfaces is an ethic that poses deep questions to the status quo, and to any definition of the good that sustains current dynamics that create oppressive structures and keep us blind to the plight of the underside of history. In *Latina/o Social Ethics* De La Torre poses this challenge directly to some of the most-studied Euro American ethicists of the twenty-first century, asking why their seemingly radical critique of US Christian cooperation with oppressive and un-Christian politics and values stopped short of advocating for those who remain continually marginalized, continually made invisible, and continually poor by the political and economic structures dominant in the US and globally. De La Torre's ongoing challenge is to the very Christian thinkers that claim to speak a message of liberation in light of the gospel, but who in his estimation do not offer a perspective radical enough to be meaningful to the poor and the marginalized. The development of his ethics of *jodiendo*, or the "trickster" as he translates it, is a nod to those figures who refuse to privilege the status quo out of a sacred devotion to political and social order, an order that represents violence and oppression for so many. He invites the Christian thinkers to see their task as that of "tricksters," interrupting order so that the voices of the oppressed can break through, inform and dominate the conversation, and be part of the shaping of their own destiny and the destiny of the nation (De La Torre 2010: 97–109).

On a personal note, I see De La Torre's activist commitments as his biggest contribution to Latino/a Christian ethics. First, De La Torre seeks to embody the ethics he proposes in his volumes through numerous efforts of advocacy, particularly for the LGBTQI community and for those crossing the border in a variety of ways. For this purpose he becomes a true public theologian, speaking often on issues of liberation and inclusion for sexual minorities, as well as activism and advocacy for migrants. Second, in 2012 De

La Torre served as the first Latino president of the Society for Christian Ethics. During his tenure in the Society, as president and before that as a member of the board and on various committees, he advocated for the Society's role in not only welcoming scholars from underrepresented groups, but also promoting their work, encouraging new generations of Hispanic ethicists, sustaining platforms for their participation in the Society, and protecting spaces for our collaboration *en conjunto*. The legacy of his efforts in the Society for the advancement of new generations of Latino and Latina ethicists has already had profound effects in the Society and the ethics academy. The welcome opportunity of being able to present a robust list of emerging ethicists at the end of this chapter is partly indebted to De La Torre's commitment and encouragement of the presence of Latino/a ethicists in the Society.

Attending to Intersecting and Interrupting Narratives

A common thread weaving throughout the discussion of the development of Latino/a ethical reflection is its attention to the narrative of *lo cotidiano* and *la lucha* of Hispanics in the US, as well as other marginalized groups. The authors have discussed present examples of doing Christian ethics from the perspective of the voices and the lives that are often invisible, silent, discarded, and discounted by the dominant political and socio-cultural forces. Through *mestizaje*, *dignidad*, and other concepts we are able to retrieve a critical edge that, as De La Torre suggests, has been missing from mainline Christian ethics in the past 130 years. This task of attending to narratives of marginalization, injustice, poverty, and exclusion, as both revelatory of God's preference for the poor and the divine call for Kin-dom justice, reflects the interdisciplinary approach that characterizes Latino/a theology and ethics. Not only do we work from an *en conjunto* collaborative framework among the theological disciplines, but we also aspire to collaborate with the social sciences in bringing color and depth to the narratives we claim inform our work. Additionally, we strive to participate in direct action and living with the marginalized communities with which we develop ethical thought, through common worship, advocacy, educational projects, and our own *cotidiano*. As liberationist thought made its move from Latin America to the US, emphasis on the authenticity of the narratives that shape interpretations of the option for the poor in the US context became a central element of Latino/a theological production.

In my own work, however, I have placed more emphasis on the intersection of the narratives of those in power, or participating in the benefits of the dominant cultural, political, and economic systems, with the narratives of those on the margins or the underside of history. This interest develops from deep reflection and appreciation of my own location and context from which I do ethical reflection and praxis. While liberation theologies and US Latino/a theological thought promote the contexts and perspectives of those in the margins, I have always understood my own context to be one marked by privilege: economic (middle-class), educational (with degrees from higher education), legal (by virtue of being a US citizen, having been born in Puerto

Rico). This is not to say that as a Latina there are not dimensions in US society where I am in the margins and excluded from access to power and influence. But I understand my call as an ethicist to be the breaking open of the narrative of power and privilege for the sake of the humanizing project of all children of God. Therefore, the task of ethical reflection has taken me to considering the ways in which narratives of privilege present obstacles to solidarity with the poor and marginalized. What particular elements in the development of the middle-class ethos, for example, keep us from authentic encounters with the narratives of suffering of others? What are ways that Christian communities with privilege (racial, political, economic, social) can practice the epistemology of *lo cotidiano*, informing themselves of the daily living, struggles, and liberative hopes and efforts of the poor, whether our direct neighbors or those neighbors in far-off lands? How do we begin to shape the spaces where these seemingly contrasting narratives intersect for interrupting privilege and questioning dominant paradigms of power, true expressions of solidarity, and greater human dignity for all?

Contrary to the interdependent and communitarian anthropology inherent in Latino/a ethics, the middle-class ethos as developed in the twentieth century, but also in its historical roots through the founding of the nation, privileges individualism and the success and promotion of the autonomous self (Dávila 2007: ch. 3). The “American Way of Life” promotes the narrative that hard work and ingenuity are the ways to take advantage of the opportunities available to all in the US. It promotes civic participation, and some measure of tolerance for diversity due to the nation’s rich history of immigration. However, it also represents a number of elements that clearly run counter to the promotion of equality, other regard or love of neighbor, peaceful resolution to conflict, solidarity with the oppressed, and other key elements of the praxis of the Christian faith. Two elements to note are the violence and materialism inherent in this concept of US culture. First, “The American Way of Life” depends historically on the conquering spirit that drove the newly independent country to seek and annex more land through westward expansion. The conquest of the “American West”⁶ in the nineteenth century relied on the narrative of Manifest Destiny, and the notion that the project of the new nation sanctioned the violent taking of Native American land for the sake of the Union, an idea that found blessing in nationalistic theologies (Dávila 2012a: 311–13). The violence of westward expansion includes the annexation of Mexican territories, turning legal citizens from longstanding families into resident aliens ((Dávila 2008: 32). Second, the development of the middle class in the twentieth century depended greatly on the economic narrative of post-World War I and post-World War II capitalism. In this narrative of US enterprise and ingenuity, the materialist and capitalist drive to mass produce and consume accordingly was marketed by both the economic and the political establishments as a way to keep the nation strong, protect against foreign interest, and keep communist socialism at bay (Dávila 2007). We add to this narrative of work, production, and consumption the philosophical and political grounding in individual rights and private property as a reward for hard work, and we are left with a sense of the self and human identity devoid of our ability to look beyond ourselves to understand

our identities and development as human beings intricately linked to the development of others, to have compassion for our neighbors in need, or to try to understand the ways in which this narrative serves to keep in place the systems that create an economic underside and victims of political and military violence. In short, the dominant narrative of the middle class in the United States leaves little room for practices of solidarity, transformation, and disruption of unjust systems, all necessary for the right development of the humanity of all, not just the poor. These very powerful narratives – The American Way of Life, Manifest Destiny, the much-beloved advice on economic virtues by Benjamin Franklin, the American Dream, free enterprise and the free market – all shape us in ways that filter into our religious imagination. The result, as has been suggested by Latino/a theologians such as María Pilar Aquino, Roberto Goizueta, Carmen Nanko-Fernández, Iván Petrella, Michael Lee, and others (Dávila 2011: 74, 77–80), is a corruption of the essence of the Christian story of liberation that significantly impairs our ability to see *lo cotidiano* of suffering and struggles for justice of so many. Not only do we become immune to narratives of suffering, but a “blame the victim” mentality sets in as well, judging between the “deserving” and “undeserving” poor, becoming arbiters of whether someone or some group has taken true advantage of the countless opportunities presumably equally available to all. The effects of these dominant narratives of power is what is understood biblically as a hardening of the heart, the inability to see our broken selves and our broken relationships with others, and the lack of spiritual poverty to let God and the gospel story of liberation effect authentic and radical transformation.

Two examples help illustrate how the dominant narrative affects our ability to perceive the narratives of suffering and joys of others in the shared quest for human fulfillment. At the end of the discussion of these two examples, I will present ways in which the churches can provide safe and constructive places for conflicting narratives to intersect as well as interrupt and subvert those narratives that impair human development by promoting excessive power and violence, obsession with consumption, material goods, and work, and reinforcing a reductionist individualism of the person. The first example involves the dominant narrative of the legal citizen, participant in the political processes of the land, and beneficiary of all the rights therein, as it intersects with the narrative from the margins or those outside of citizenship, of migrants struggling in search of opportunities and safety, not able to stake a claim in the social and political fabric of the country. In the United States the migrant narrative is considered part of the fabric of “making it in America,” coming to this country with little to show, working hard, individually and sometimes with others, to create business and industry, contributing richly to US society, culture, and scientific advancement. But this romanticized narrative of the immigrant industrialist or entrepreneur crassly ignores two things. First, it poses clear distinctions between earlier waves of immigrants from European countries and more recent immigration from the global South. Second, it conveniently forgets real hardships experienced by those earlier waves of migrants – through tough immigration, citizenship, and voting laws, limits to the kinds of employment they could seek, and severe limitations on the places where they could live.

Families from established communities today meet migrant families at an intersection that brings together earlier narratives of hard work, success, and integration of established families with current narratives of exclusion, poverty, separation of families through deportation or indefinite detention, and lack of a political identity.⁷ One narrative has been used, manipulated if you will, as one of the grounding elements of the “American Way of Life”: coming to this country and taking advantage of the opportunities, supposedly available to all, to pull oneself up by one’s own bootstraps and succeed in business and community. The other narrative has been “otherized,” made not common with the first in a threatening and almost violent way (Dávila 2012a: 308).⁸ It includes the perceived threat that migrant families take advantage of already taxed social services and public goods such as schools and hospitals while not contributing to them, or that their presence negatively impacts property values, crime rates, and public safety.

The intersection of the migration narratives of established communities and new immigrants therefore brings two very different stories together, stories deceptively devoid of any common threads, stories designed to speak past each other and fear each other. Both narratives have been tampered with, manipulated by and for the dominant ethos that serves to uphold an economic system that requires an underclass of cheap and disposable migrant labor to sustain itself (Dávila 2012b: 219, 223).

Like the participation of the churches in the sacralization and blessing of the middle-class ethos and the American Way of Life (for example, the prosperity gospel or Billy Graham’s crusades, which would rail against communism and provide an uncritical blessing of the American Way of Life), the migrant narrative is also used in both positive and negative ways to uphold the middle-class ethos. However, this is a selective engagement with such narratives, privileging the story of the Pilgrims landing on Plymouth Rock and building an entirely new nation (a complex and dangerous memory, to say the least), while conveniently overlooking the pilgrim refugee, seeking asylum today. The anti-immigrant movement, too, needs sacralization. Sacralization means it is important to narratives of power and domination that religious groups participate in the process of demonizing the other (“othering”), baptizing the rule of law, privileging order over justice. Emphasis on the criminality of illegally crossing borders – rather than biblical or theological notions of the stranger or sojourner – is prioritized because the rule of law is seen as primordial to protecting the state we have come to recognize and identify as blessing and divine gift.

For many, perhaps, this overwhelmingly comes to shape their political theology, rather than the biblically grounded criterion of a nation being judged by how it treats its most vulnerable, especially the migrant. This phenomenon will go so far as to promote violent rhetoric toward the “illegal other” even when welcoming the stranger is a condition for salvation, as stipulated in Matthew 25:31–46. When we feel the American Way of Life threatened, our own religious convictions and teachings take a back seat to our commitment to nation and rule of law. This was evidenced by an increased sense of threat after September 11, 2001. The perception that lax immigration policies were to blame for the victimization that attacked us at the core of our

way of life – commercial flights for leisure or business – meant that immigration was now a direct threat to what we held as dear and sacred.

The conversion required and effected by crossing this threshold is significant because it requires that we dismantle key elements of what we consider the sacred political identity of being “an American,” flawed as this might be. It takes a shifting of identities, from one that is secure in the blessing of the nation-state and its rule of law, to an identity that acknowledges our shared vulnerability as sojourners, while admitting to experiencing different degrees of vulnerability as citizens and as migrants.

A second example of narratives of power, domination, and order obscuring or blinding us to the plight of those who suffer, especially those who are geographically far away and victims of our own violent impulses, is the privileging of imperial power and order in the “just war” theory as it has been inherited in Western Christianity, especially in its roots in the thought of St Augustine (Dávila, forthcoming).⁹ For Augustine, imperial power and order, especially the authority of rulers, were imbued with divine authority. He understood the social nature of the human being who needs community to live and thrive, and therefore saw the state and its authorities as a gift of God for the right ordering of the human family. However, his privileging of order as important to serve the needs of humans in community leads him to reinforce the sacred identity of rulers and civil authorities. When it comes to the use of force, then, Augustine will see the authority of the ruler to castigate the wrongdoer as absolute and God-given, and the role of the soldier as one of strict obedience. Relying on biblical passages in both Hebrew and Christian texts, Augustine presents God as putting armies to use in the task of correcting enemies for the sake of peace, where peace and the order of the state or empire are privileged over a peace that takes the plight of victims of violence in other lands as equally worthy to be upheld. For Augustine, the peace of an occupation or conquest is tragic, but more desirable than the rebellious uprising of the masses or occupied territories.

The criteria of right authority and right intention in just war theory perpetuate Augustine’s privileging of the power and order of civil authorities and rulers. And because of Augustine’s context within the Roman Empire in the fifth century, it becomes clear that it is imperial order that he is privileging, the one most likely to possess the most land, the biggest armies, and the most ammunition to engage in battles with aggressors or neighbors “in need of correction.” Rarely does the story or narrative of the suffering of the other enter into the considerations in Augustine and subsequent development of just war criteria. How does attention to *lo cotidiano* break through this narrative of power, domination, and order to question who has right authority to do violence to someone else? Is our failure to truly listen to the hopes and goals of communities on the ground, dismissing them as unimportant in the process of making decisions about the use of our military, actually affecting whether our missions truly seek peace for all? How is our general population empowered to be part of the right authority, to opine and speak about our own goals for how our national resources are used in the aid of others – as an expression of *acompañamiento*¹⁰ and solidarity – so that recourse to violence becomes a less viable or attractive alternative?

This brief presentation on two examples of seemingly opposing narratives of *lo cotidiano* interacting in negative and even violent ways raises the question for me of how our churches, teachers of gospel values and the Christian narrative of liberation and love of neighbor, can serve as places for intersection and interruption. There are various locations where opposing narratives intersect without a peaceful resolution that leads to acts of solidarity and the interrupting of systems of oppression. Mass media, cable news networks, social networks, and blogs are common places where the battles between these narratives are played out. Often our churches remain on the sidelines of these considerations, or play a minimal role in assuaging the intolerance or violence that such misguided clashes promote. Another level for encounter, however, demands that a threshold of indifference and the privileging of the status quo be reached, where an opposing narrative of care, love, justice, and salvation – perhaps the Christian narrative of Jesus' life – stakes a claim on the faithful challenging and resisting of centuries of formation in narratives of power, domination, self-fulfillment, consumerism, and militarism. Crossing the threshold imposed by negative ideas of immigration, the middle-class ethos, national identity, and military politics demands that churches become places where these narratives can be dismantled by *lo cotidiano* of the suffering and justice-seeking of others.

As a result of a call to intersect and interrupt narratives that support the status quo, narratives that dehumanize those with privilege and sustain injustice for those who suffer, my current research focuses on examining how churches and communities of faith interpret, define, and engage public witness and activism/advocacy. This participatory, ethnographic, action-oriented study seeks to engage churches and people of faith, mainly in the Christian tradition, in conversations to discern where they are being called in their public witness, activism, and advocacy. The study pays particular attention to how people of faith from mainly middle-class and Anglo American backgrounds wade through the narratives that have formed them regarding who the other is, what love of neighbor means, the differences between activism and mission as requirements of the Christian faith, and open themselves to the narratives of the suffering of others. Through attentive listening to the narrative of those with power and privilege, I hope to understand ways in which the church can contribute to interrupting and disrupting these narratives, enabling and ushering conversion, so that we may attend to *lo cotidiano* of those on the margins. This means placing this dominant narrative in the historical and socio-political context of the shaping of the middle-class ethos and a privileged class that acquiescently participates in a system that sustains their privilege, all the while claiming victims from an invisible underside, through either economic oppression, legal exclusion, or military incursion. Conversion that leads to public witness, activism, and advocacy has to include a combination of forces that can override the dominant narrative shaping the faithful in privileged settings. The dominant narratives of middle-class life in the US are real obstacles to practices of solidarity, compassion, *acompañamiento*, attention to *lo cotidiano* of our neighbor, and suchlike, because they serve to blind us to our vulnerabilities (contingent employment or underemployment, high cost of higher education and few opportunities upon graduation, volatility in the housing market, injustice in the area of medical services, among other shared vulnerabilities) – our own *lo cotidiano*. In addition, they

falsely insist that our lives will improve through individual struggles that are overcome by a better job, a raise, a new home, better education, but they rarely see the upending of the status quo and solidarity with others – such as more welcoming and humane immigration law – as the solution.

How do our churches function as places where we can begin to see and work toward shared narratives of vulnerability as a way to challenge and interrupt narratives of the middle-class ethos, domination, order, and power? First, churches need to be places where the Christian narrative of Divine love become incarnate in human suffering, death, and transformation through resurrection and radical inclusion – is offered as disruptive of other dominant and oppressive narratives. This epistemic shift must be at the core of the educational mission of Christian churches, as it truly impinges on formation of the faithful from a very young age. Second, and also with an educational focus, communities of faith must be safe spaces that encourage questioning dominant narratives as they impact our practices of faith, whether through dealings in the church itself (finances, organizational structure, leadership models) or through dynamics at play in our everyday lives (such as conversations on immigration in the public square and the political realm, understanding the financial crisis, the Occupy movement, or the underside of a ‘free market’). Third, through the preferential option for the poor, communities of faith must be incarnational as a model for being attentive to *lo cotidiano* of suffering, interrupting dominant narratives of power and order, and working alongside the poor, excluded, oppressed, or marginalized to challenge and transform systemic injustice while challenging our own role in upholding such systems. Initial findings in my study thus far point to the fact that encountering narratives of the suffering of others through some form of becoming incarnate in their reality in some way does provide points of intersection, interruption, and disruption of the status quo. Churches need to offer periodic, authentic, respectful, and faithful opportunities for such incarnational practices to become second nature to their membership, rather than being presented as an occasional incursion or excursion into the lives of the poor. By focusing on public witness, activism, and advocacy, incarnational practices are characterized by the mutual in-breaking of narratives, rather than sustaining a paternalistic perspective on mission and outreach. The faithful need to come to expect dis-location (the incarnational dimension), challenge, and transformation as commonplace practices of their life in a community of faith. My hope is to continue exploring these questions and themes as challenges to national church bodies and their framing of mission and discipleship for their churches, as well as their relevance for the design of seminary education and the training of faith leaders for social transformation and change.

Voces Nuevas – New Voices

I find myself working out the implications of my work, challenges to my assumptions, and particular applicability of insights within an extended family of *en conjunto* that has a bright and rich landscape for this moment and in the future of Latino/a ethics. This last

section focuses on introducing some of these promising voices that have already solidly evidenced their commitment to ethical reflection, in light of Latino/a theological thought, for transforming the way we address some of the deepest injustices of our time. Noteworthy in their work is their strong engagement of praxis alongside reflection, whether through activism, advocacy, presence, *acompañamiento*, or other forms of active and incarnational solidarity with the poor in various contexts. On a daily basis, I find myself learning something new from these colleagues' observations and incarnational practices that helps recharge and refocus my own thoughts and efforts.

I begin with three of my contemporaries. Working in the areas of theology and culture, reformation theology, and world Christianity (among other themes), Rubén Rosario Rodríguez' work exhibits the interdisciplinary and ecumenical thrust that has marked Latino/a ethics from the beginning. His volume *Racism and God Talk: A Latino/a Perspective* (2008) reflects on the work of Elizondo and Isasi-Díaz, toward a reconceptualization of *mestizaje* in Latino/a thought that seeks inclusion and communion across Christian traditions, driven by the uniqueness of the new situation while acknowledging current racial dynamics of exclusion. Boldly, Rosario Rodríguez takes a look at how *mestizaje* can serve as an exclusionary vision at work within Latino/a communities, but one which can be refashioned as dialogical encounter among many, rather than an essentialist identity of the few. His analysis brings in resources from the social sciences and philosophy, such as critical race theory and postcolonial theories, in a truly interdisciplinary approach to the question of identity and exclusion. Teresa Delgado's "interests and scholarship are interdisciplinary in method and scope, utilizing the experience of women, particularly Latinas, to articulate a constructive theological vision, both grounded in and critical of Latino culture and the Roman Catholic theological tradition" (Delgado, p.c., March 2014). Throughout her publications, Delgado attempts to recover notions of the human shaped by the experience of women on the margins, Latinas and otherwise, with a focus on sexual identity, expression, and practices as they contribute to developing a relevant Catholic sexual ethic.¹¹ As director of the Peace and Justice Studies Program at Iona College, Delgado helps usher often first-generation college students through an ever-expanding vision of human identity and justice. Finally, Ramón Luzárraga exemplifies the bridge between Latin American – particularly Caribbean thinkers in the English- and Spanish-speaking islands – and Latino/a theologians in the US. His interests include deep study of the histories of slavery, colonialism, and postcolonialism in the Caribbean in his search for rapprochement and conversation among diverse Caribbean groups. A powerful element in Luzárraga's praxis is his commitment to supporting and encouraging Latino/a ethicists through his leadership in the Society for Christian Ethics. Taking the leadership of the Latino/a Interest and Working Group, Luzárraga has furthered De La Torre's work in the Society by insuring that every year's meeting includes an intergroup component, with the African and African-American and the Asian and Asian American interest and working groups. These conversations have been rich and fruitful, highlighting for the Society the significant contributions to Christian ethics of historically underrepresented groups in the academy, while encouraging a cross-cultural conversation on urgent ethical issues

grounded in our own sources and contexts. Luzárraga's commitment to sustaining and nourishing a visible platform for current and emerging voices in Latino/a ethics is unparalleled. He is currently working on a volume on Latino/a ethics for the Fortress Press series "Disruptive Cartographers: Remapping Theology Latinamente."

Elías Ortega, Robyn Henderson-Espinoza, and Nichole Flores all signal emerging methodologies and interests that build on the work of generations past. Their attentiveness to particular narratives of oppression and exclusion sheds light on communities and experiences that many would like to conveniently forget or keep hidden from social concerns: the incarcerated, materiality of the body as ethical discourse, and women migrant workers, respectively. They also represent three distinct religious traditions as lived by a new generation: Pentecostal/humanist, humanist, and Roman Catholic. For Ortega the interdisciplinary approach calls for teasing out the implications of social scientific methodologies as well as the natural sciences as discovery tools in religious and Christian ethics. He suggests that understanding assumptions that social scientists and religious/theological ethicists bring to the table about the nature of society, the meaning of religion, the multidimensionality of agency, and how these shape research projects is just as important as unmasking these assumptions in theological thought. His continual development of a religious social ethics from an Afro Latino/a perspective seeks to illuminate the ways in which Afro-Latinos/as conceptualize issues of epistemology, ethics, and ontology. His exploration of moral agency from this perspective is innovatively applied to the question of moral agency in incarcerated populations, mainly among Latino and African American males.

Robyn Henderson-Espinoza grounds her thought in Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*, along with queer theories, the New Materialism movement, and queer epistemologies, to consider the materiality of the body as location for philosophical discourse incarnating frontiers and borderlands of its own. She considers her work "to exist in the in between spaces of ethics, ontology, and epistemology and works to establish a speculatively queer material realism. Robyn's research focuses on the materiality of the body and begins research in the intersecting realities of theories and discourse focusing particularly on the intersection of philosophy and culture" (Henderson-Espinoza, p.c., March 2014). Her work leads her to seek where humans find places of interrelatedness and interconnection through the particular lens of Latina feminist epistemologies (Henderson-Espinoza 2012, 2013). Her work, therefore, opens urgently needed new avenues of conversation between new voices in Latina feminist thought and other feminist discourses in challenging ways.

For Nichole Flores, the location of the migrant in our land, invisible in her labor for the produce and other foods we consume, is the location from which she engages in ethical reflection challenging the longstanding Roman Catholic tradition of theological ethics and moral theology. Flores' research emphasizes the contribution of Catholic and US Latina/o theologies to notions of justice and the common good within plural sociopolitical contexts. Her focus on narratives of migration as locus for ethical reflection has her exploring complex intersections between human trafficking and consumerism,

human trafficking and immigration reform, and how these intersections relate to political liberalism and Catholic and Latina notions of justice. In her praxis, Flores is an advocate for the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, relating their stories in her work and taking seriously the challenge presented by the most unfair of wages in the US for a community of the human family all too often made invisible. Within this advocacy work she specifically highlights the experience of women migrant farmworkers as the locus of violence and injustice, staking a high claim on our national religious imagination.¹²

Lastly, three more voices deserve mention: Jeremy Cruz, Victor Carmona, and René Sánchez. Cruz' work, teaching, and research interests are in the areas of economic ethics and in the ethics of political violence and peace-building. His current research is focused on moral theories of social in/equality and their relevance for labor relations and workers' rights (e.g. Cruz 2013). Carmona's work reflects on experiences of migration, articulating for and working with Roman Catholic authorities, bishops' offices, dioceses, and other bodies for a better response to immigration that is grounded in ever-challenging expressions of Christian love as articulated in Catholic social thought. In his work, Sánchez explores identity politics and formation as they relate to the construction of the other and her ethical demands within a culture of empire and domination. He moves this discussion into new territory by engaging feminist and queer critique from the perspective of a male scholar. Cruz, Carmona, and Sánchez all seek to engage and challenge their church with respect to the complexity and new realities of advocacy and solidarity with peoples and communities on the margins within the US today.

Attentive to the urgency of *lo cotidiano* of the communities and contexts they represent, these voices all participate in one way or another in a new arenas for ethical expression through online forums, writing blogs, or maintaining their own internet pages.¹³ Together we share a passion for direct action for advocacy and engagement with communities on the margins, and bring these as crucial interlocutors into our classrooms and our scholarship. However, we remain challenged by an academy that doesn't always consider activism and advocacy true elements of a scholar's vocation. Current generations of Latino/a ethicists also consider the intersection of narratives of privilege and exclusion as vital work, but they present a challenge that comes with new visions and revised definitions of *mestizaje*, *lo cotidiano*, *en la lucha*, and *acompañamiento*, generated by conversations with theories, experiences, and contexts previously unexplored, such as questions of sexual ethics and identity, human trafficking and contemporary slavery in the US, perspectives on family, immigration reform, and economic dislocation and economic justice since the financial crash of 2008. In turn, these ethicists invite us to work together toward new answers to the critical ethical questions: "How did we get here? What do we do now?"

We are in a time when Latino/a ethics desperately needs to engage and collaborate with ethicists from other groups, those from communities traditionally underrepresented in the academy, as well as with allies who have risked much to include our voices and our

agenda in their own classrooms and scholarship. The challenges to human dignity and environmental integrity that confront us today require the multidisciplinary, cross-generational, inter-ethnic, and ecumenical collaboration that was first modeled for us by earlier generations of Latino/a theologians. Multifaith and interfaith efforts in ethical reflection must be added to this list as a source for rich encounters and the production of alternative ways of being human that promote solidarity and wholeness.

Notes

- 1 For discussion on the transition of the option for the poor from its original Latin American context to the Hispanic US context see, for example, Nanko-Fernandez (2002) and Aquino (1999).
- 2 Defined (respectively) as, first, the process of the fusion of various traditions and cultures (sometimes violently through conquest, as in the Americas); the struggle; theology done collaboratively; accompaniment; and dignity.
- 3 A concise and thorough definition of *mujerista* theology can be found through Isasi-Díaz's web page in the Drew University site, at <http://users.drew.edu/aisasidi/Definition1.htm>. An excerpt from this definition describes it thus: "A *mujerista* is someone who makes a preferential option for Latina women, for their struggle for liberation. *Mujeristas* struggle to liberate themselves not as individuals, but as members of a Latino community. They work to build bridges among Latinos/as while denouncing sectarianism and divisionary tactics. *Mujeristas* understand that their task is to gather the hopes and expectations of the people about justice and peace. *Mujeristas* believe that in them, though not exclusively so, God chooses to once again lay claim to, to revindicate, the divine image and likeness made visible in Latinas."
- 4 Isasi-Díaz explains that "anthropology developed out of the lived-experience of Latinas centers on a subject who struggles to survive and who understands herself as one who struggles. A small but common indication of this is how, to the casual question "How are you?" grassroots Latinas commonly respond just as casually, "*Ahí, en la lucha*" (Isasi-Díaz 2004: 178).
- 5 There are a number of other concepts and important authors within Latino/a theology that are also critical for ethical reflection. *Religión popular*, *acompañamiento*, *fiesta*, and *comunidad* are examples of these. The scope of this chapter limits the depth and breadth of this discussion, but the reader is encouraged to seek other concepts throughout this volume to engage with the methodologies suggested here.
- 6 In this context the term "American" is used for the United States, though this practice is not encouraged as the American continent encompasses numerous countries, peoples, and cultures that do not need to be subsumed to US hegemonic ideology as the only country that can adequately take on the name of an entire continent.
- 7 On this last point, as recently as October 2013, a report from the Pew Research on Hispanic Trends Project (Lopez 2013) showed that the majority of Hispanics in the US believe they should have a national leader, but three out of four couldn't name one, pointing to the political disaffection that is part of the Hispanic experience in the US.

- 8 For the purpose of Christian ethics, “the process of racialization of the other in society leads to the institutionalization of the superiority of one group over the perceived inferiority of another, within a spectrum of social, political, and economic relations that include the dehumanization of the inferior other. In some cases it even results in their philosophical and, unfortunately [and tragically], often concrete and very real elimination from history. The racialized other is thus excluded from history or perceived as outside of history, as *prehistoric*” (Dávila 2012a: 308).
- 9 This discussion on narratives of order and power with respect to just war ethics is a summary of my contribution in this forthcoming volume.
- 10 Focus on Latino/a ethicists did not provide much space for discussing a number of essential building blocks of Latino/a theology. *Acompañamiento* is one such concept, developed in the work of theologian Roberto Goizueta. Drawing from Latino/a imagery of accompaniment – practices of being with others along the path of particular sufferings and sharing in that suffering for hope and transformation – Goizueta (1999) develops a rich and particularly Latino understanding of solidarity and “walking with” that places the emphasis on establishing real connections with the other who suffers, rather than just a superficial or tokenized expression of solidarity.
- 11 For her development in a Latina anthropology and sexual ethics, see Delgado (2009a, 2009b, 2013, 2014).
- 12 Flores’ work includes reflection on the ethical significance of the Latino/a family for notions of the Common Good. See Flores (2013).
- 13 Both Ramón Luzárraga and Nichole Flores are regular contributors to the moral theology blog www.catholicmoraltheology.com. During the early weeks of the Occupy movement I contributed to the blog www.theologysalon.org, on the topic of Catholic social thought and its parallels with the concerns and agenda of that movement, as well as contributing to www.ecclesio.org, and www.catholicmoraltheology.com.

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CHAPTER 15

Liturgies and Sacraments *Latinamente*

Eduardo Fernández, SJ

La Vida Sacra: Contemporary Latino/a Sacramental Theology

During my Masters of Divinity program at the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley and the Graduate Theological Union from 1988 to 1991, I took two courses in the area of sacraments which particularly marked my thinking in this area: Allan Figueroa Deck's course entitled "Hispanic Confessional Counseling" and James Empereur's course on the sacraments. While Deck's course convinced me that the same ritual could take on many different meanings in various cultural contexts, Empereur's introduced me to the phenomenological approach to these sacred rituals, that is, one which focused more on their meaning as people celebrated them and less on their official theology. Subsequent years of celebrating and teaching about sacraments have convinced me of the wisdom of this approach, especially to the extent that it respects the uniqueness of the cultural context. As a junior professor at the same school in the late 1990s, I sought out Empereur to consider writing a book with me on sacraments in a Latino/a context, one in which he would describe what he wished he would have known about the way Latinas and Latinos celebrate sacraments before his move to San Fernando Cathedral in San Antonio, Texas. At that time, the noted pioneer in US Latino/a theology, Virgilio Elizondo, served as rector and was known for integrating Latino/a popular devotional practices into the cathedral's formal liturgy. The end result, some years later, of my collaboration with Empereur was the book *La Vida Sacra: Contemporary Hispanic Sacramental Theology* (Empereur and Fernández 2006), a work we were able to produce in part because of a grant we received from the Louisville Institute.

In order to get a sense for what liturgies and sacraments looked like "*latinamente*" and how we could contribute to their further development in our communities, we held a

series of consultations with pastoralists and theologians in three cities – Berkeley, Chicago, and San Antonio – from 1998 to 2000. The results of these gatherings were noteworthy. One of the first things we heard was that we did not need another “how-to” book. The valuable materials produced by previous attempts to reflect pastorally on ways to adapt liturgical and sacramental norms to our communities have abounded since they first began to be written in the early 1970s. Among the most helpful in this regard is *Primero Dios: Hispanic Liturgical Resource* (Francis and Pérez-Rodríguez 1997). The work of Raúl Gómez Ruiz, who has also been exploring the relationship between Latino/a popular religious practices and the Church’s formal liturgy, is also noteworthy. His piece on *El Día de los Muertos*, “The Day of the Dead: Celebrating the Continuity of Life and Death” (Gómez Ruiz 1997), is particularly helpful in this regard. In another piece, “Hispanic Ministry, Liturgy and Spirituality” (Gómez Ruiz, 2010), he provides an insightful contemporary assessment of how these three areas intersect. Among other useful resources which give examples of inculturated forms of worship was and is *Misa, Mesa y Musa: Liturgy in the U.S. Hispanic Church* (Davis 1997).

What was now needed, something which emerged from the consultations prior to the writing of the book on Latino/a sacramental theology, then, was not so much a “how-to” book as a “why” book. That is, the more pressing need was to explore precisely *why* Latinos/as celebrate sacraments as they do or, for example, to reflect about what is behind these practices of popular piety. Other important questions surfaced. What particular gifts do Latinos/as bring to the liturgical table? What major theological themes are being articulated in the celebration of a particular instance of Latino/a popular religion? How are Latino/a communities being challenged by the larger sacramental tradition? How might this book be a resource for our increasing multicultural celebrations? And, finally, how might this book serve as a model for doing pastoral theology?

One of our initial observations was that academic theology and pastoral theology are often defined in opposition to each other, thus impoverishing both fields. While academic theology runs the risk of lacking sufficient grounding in pastoral experience (and some of the greatest early theologians, such as Augustine, were very much steeped in the pastoral world), pastoral theology has the difficulty of escaping the world of particularity. The book was an attempt to bridge this gap, acknowledging that sacramental theology and ethics are two of the most obvious areas for bringing together the worlds of academic and pastoral theologians.

Because the book was about sacraments which today are often being understood as religious rites of passage, because they are celebrated at key moments in the life of the person within community (Martos 2001), it posed a particular challenge. How to write about *all* of Latino/a life, from birth to death, even if admittedly from a more Catholic perspective? To further complicate matters, the Latino/a communities in the United States, particularly in recent years, are growing not only in numbers but in diversity. Aside from the fact that most Latinos/as now live in suburbs as opposed to the majority living in the inner cities (with the kinds of social class implications this shift may imply), denominational affiliation has become more diverse, a significant number leaving the Catholic Church; numerous national groups other than the Mexicans are

increasing; and a much younger population than that of the US in general is showing signs of postmodernism's embrace of pluralism.

Edwin Aponte's book *Santo!* is particularly helpful in demonstrating this variety of religious expressions found today among Latinos/as (Aponte 2012). For example, in Chapter 4, "Rituals in the Passages of Life," he lists the six categories of ritual action as described by Catherine Bell (1997): (1) rites of passage; (2) calendrical and commemorative rites; (3) rites of exchange and communion; (4) rites of affliction; (5) rites of feasting, fasting, and festivals; and (6) political rituals; he concludes that all of these are present in Latino/a religion and spirituality. He proceeds to give a variety of examples from the various national groups of Latinos/as, even including some examples outside of Christianity, as when he describes some Latino/a Muslim practices.

Amidst such diversity, but at the same time not wishing to ignore the importance of tradition(s) for Latinos/as, we make two major claims in *Vida Sacra*: one, that a sacramental theology must be rooted in and nurtured by an authentic tradition, the Latino/a practice and spirituality of popular religion being one such tradition; and two, just as contemporary theology is being directed to give greater emphasis to the theology of creation, so sacramental theology must situate itself within a framework of cosmic sacramentality. These assertions were not difficult to substantiate as, in fact, a theology of creation is fundamental to a theology of the sacraments. Our claim in the work, one which fits in well with the contemporary desire to recover the early Church's appreciation of mystery, especially as encountered through the role of the material, is that Latino/a sacramentality already contains a sense of this cosmic or creation-centered sacramentality.

The basic structure of the book proceeds along the lines of the Catholic Church's seven official sacraments, especially in terms of what their celebration might look like in a Latino/a context. Cognizant of life's stages, we began with a general discussion of the overall sacramentality of the Latino/a experience, then went on to detail the rites of initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and to some extent First Eucharist); passage into adulthood in Church and family (with further elaboration on the rites of initiation especially as connected to the faith journey of the Rite of Christian Initiation, RCIA; *Quinceañera*, and ministry with and among Latino/a youth); the witness of the family (Matrimony); the ministry of leadership (lay and ordained); encounters of healing and brokenness in family and Church (Reconciliation/Penance and Anointing of the Sick); and finally, the passage to new life (popular and liturgical rites around death, burial, and remembrance). Despite its importance throughout history to the Christian community, we decided not to devote a separate chapter to the Eucharist. This sacred meal with all its denominational variations, the sacrament that is celebrated throughout the life of the Christian often not only on a weekly basis, but also in conjunction with many of the other sacramental celebrations, is often present at life's key moments, at least among certain groups. For this reason, then, we decided to discuss it within certain of the celebrations mentioned as a way of emphasizing the integration of the Eucharist into the whole life of the Christian.

Each of our chapters features not only a description of these sacramental celebrations but also what particular gift is being brought forth for the larger Church and

society, together with how the larger sacramental understanding and practice challenge the various Latino/a communities, as all cultures are in need of being evangelized. A review of these rites in all their diversity sheds light on both their communal aspect, especially to the extent that they strive to preserve the communitarian nature of faith, one which is an essential part of both the popular and official, and how they function as pathways to the sacred as experienced in tangible signs, gestures, and symbols.

As alluded to previously, one of the major reasons why our piece on sacramental theology could be written from a US Latino/a perspective has to do with the pioneering works of such theologians as Virgilio Elizondo, Orlando Espín, María Pilar Aquino, Allan Figueroa Deck, Roberto Goizueta, the late Ada María Isasi-Díaz, and Alejandro García-Rivera. To the extent that they focused on the popular as a *locus theologicus*, as well as to the cotidiano, they called attention to the theological truths which these practices reveal in such areas as grace, salvation, and sin.

Having described *Vida Sacra*, which aimed to provide a more systematic view of both academic and pastoral sacramental theology in this regard, it is important now to mention other works not taken up there, material which not only calls our attention to the past but also sheds some light on directions we might want to pursue in future theological discourse. Although our book was the first systematic work specifically dedicated to contemporary Latino/a sacramental theology, and its bibliography is a witness to the vast amount of literature from which we can now draw, other theologians are making significant contributions to the study of official and familial liturgies and sacraments *latinamente*.

Some liturgists, such as Raul Gómez Ruiz, caution against trying to separate liturgy from popular religiosity, which he defines as “the expressions of spirituality that some call popular religion, piety, or devotional practices. All are attempts to describe a complex reality: the experience of or faith in a transcendent reality and its incorporation into everyday life, especially by those who are not religious elites” (Gómez Ruíz, 2010: 132). He develops this reality and its theological and pastoral significance further in *Mozarabs, Hispanics, and the Cross* (Gómez Ruíz, 2007). Orlando Espín’s description of popular religion, as he prefers to name it, attempting to remove it from its derivative expression, “religiosity”, is more connected with the religion of poor people, as in the connotation of the Spanish word *popular* (Fernández 2000).

Some Historical Considerations and Definitions

History has witnessed different forms of Christian worship; for example, there are various understandings of what is meant by sacraments, and much of this is colored by denominational affiliation. It is difficult to speak of theological precision when discussing sacraments because “there is disagreement about the theological definition of sacraments, how they operate, how many there are, and whether sacramentals¹ contribute to or distract from Christian commitment. Most of these issues can be attributed to

denominational differences between Catholics and most other Christians" (Stevens-Arroyo 2009: 727). Because of these differences, the same author holds that Latino/a theological reflection, cognizant of ecumenical sensitivities, has not explicitly addressed controversial issues in sacramental theology. While this chapter will not describe this history of controversies which often took certain stage in the Protestant Reformation, it is helpful to briefly outline several understandings of sacraments from a Catholic perspective which have some acceptance in certain Protestant communities, particularly those characterized by a stronger liturgical tradition.

Victor Codina (1993) provides three definitions of sacraments, given here in bold, each corresponding to a historical era and situation in the Church. Each definition takes from the previous one, augmenting it and enriching it with new elements, and displays, according to Codina, some advantages and some disadvantages.

1. **Sacraments are efficacious instruments of grace.** This description gives the classical definition which stresses that the Church is like a great deposit of grace and that the sacraments are the channels for us to receive this grace. Through his passion, Christ has obtained this grace and the Church, which administers it through its ministers, the priests, is the deposit of this treasure. The advantage of this definition is that it is clear and popular, explaining well the fact that sacraments cause grace, relating them to the Christ. The disadvantage, however, is that it runs the danger of becoming somewhat individualistic, and almost mechanical or magical; a sort of "sacramental service station." It can promote a passive attitude which does not take into account the rich ecclesial and symbolic character each possesses.
2. **Sacraments are important moments for the Church which itself is a sacrament.** This description flows out of Vatican II theology, and recovers the ancient understanding of the primitive Church wherein Christ and the Church are the fundamental sacraments. Sacraments are therefore important moments in the life of this Church. What is stressed is the ecclesial dimension. So, for example, baptism initiates one into this Christian community, penance reconciles the sinner to the community, marriage forms the domestic Church, and ordained ministries have to do with the Church's mission, the Eucharist being the heart of the Church, one which brings about the communion of Christ and the ecclesial body.

The advantage of this description is that it is much richer than the preceding one because it is more communal and ecclesial and also because it conceives of the sacraments as ecclesial prayer, an invocation of the Spirit, brought about through symbolic gestures. Not only does it stress the communal but it also stresses the personal, since it includes the faith, preparation, and disposition of the person(s) receiving the sacrament. Its disadvantage, however, is that it runs the risk of focusing too much on the ecclesial, as opposed to the wider social reality.

- 3. Sacraments are prophetic signs celebrated in the Church of the Reign or Kingdom of God.** This definition is strongly influenced by Latin American theology in contact with the Christian Base Communities of poor persons committed to liberation. It adds the Reign of God dimension to the preceding definition. Therefore, the sacraments are symbols which announce God's Kingdom, anticipate it prophetically, and denounce contrary elements in our history. This definition insists on the sacraments' binding or committing power on the believer. Through baptism, for example, the person goes from death to life, confirmation gives one the grace to struggle for justice for the poor in our world, reconciliation struggles against the sin of the world, marriage works to embody a new humanity, ordained ministries have to do with orienting pastoral service toward mercy in favor of the poor, anointing of the sick commits us to work for the health of all, and the Eucharist convokes us to live in solidarity.

A key advantage is that this definition, which presupposes the previous one, focuses on the Reign of God, which is what the Church should be about since that is what Jesus preached. A disadvantage, however, is that it runs the risk of placing too much stress on the human versus God's initiative or grace. It should, nonetheless, not be seen as in opposition because, ultimately, it is this very grace of God which summons us to the task of collaborating with the Reign of God. It is not disconnected from the passion and resurrection of Jesus.

Codina concludes that all three definitions complement each other. In fact, as he states, "St. Thomas of Aquinas, the medieval theologian, already was saying that a sacrament is a sign that recalls the passion of Jesus, one which effects grace in the church, and anticipates the Reign of God" (Codina 1993: 104). While Codina is writing about the more official seven rites which are developed from a Latino/a perspective in *La Vida Sacra* (Empereur and Fernández 2006), their sacramental world or spiritual practices around liturgy and worship embrace a much wider scope. While Catholic forms include such practices as the rosary, the *via crucis* or Way of the Cross, patronal feasts around devotion to Mary or to the other saints – all popular forms of worship, incidentally, which tend to be led by women, and some of which take place in the home – recent writings are demonstrating that Protestants are not bereft of such practices which speak volumes of the "faith of the people."

At times these manifestations among Latino/a Protestants take the form of Bible study groups, *testimonios* (or oral testimonies by believers about what God is doing in their lives, affording an opportunity for community assent), vigils, singing or *corritos*, and so on (Conde-Frazier 1997). As any observer can plainly see, the fastest-growing group of Christians worldwide today are Pentecostals, whose style of worship is markedly different from that of the liturgical traditions already emphasized. According to Arlene Sánchez-Walsh, "Pentecostalism is a movement within evangelical Christianity that stresses the manifestations of the gifts of the Holy Spirit as outlined in the Book of Acts and Chapters 12–16 of the First Letter to the Corinthians" (Sánchez-Walsh 2006:

199). This scholar, known for her work on Latino/a Pentecostals, explains why such popular practices as *testimonios* are so transformative: “*Testimonios* bring God’s reality and presence into the everyday communication of congregants, who see that God cares about one’s health, one’s financial situation, and can deal with the most miniscule of concerns” (Sánchez-Walsh 2006: 200). This type of oral witnessing can lead to prayer at the altar, which subsequently can provide an opportunity for someone to receive Spirit baptism and have hands laid on them for healing. Sánchez-Walsh quotes Pentecostal theologian Samuel Soliván, who stresses the Holy Spirit’s active role in bringing about the healing, a healing not disconnected from social transformation: “For Pentecostals, reaching out to the unwed mother, the homeless, the poor and the alcoholic is as politically important as electing a local official. From a Pentecostal perspective, the preaching of the gospel in [*sic*] the most politically and socially radical activity the world has known” (Sánchez-Walsh 2006: 202).

This Pentecostal style of worship is now often found in other denominations, including Catholicism, and is sometimes referred to as the Charismatic Movement. Popular among Latinos/as, it allows for a more spontaneous, emotional style of worship, one which often fosters community and promotes the reading of the Bible.

Some Possible Future Directions

As I think about what is happening in our Latino/a communities in terms of liturgies (official and familial) and sacraments, and recall the ancient dictum *Lex orandi, lex credendi*, or “as the Church prays, so she believes,” I am reminded of how this lived faith reality is providing a valuable source for our future theologizing. As I see it, there are several areas in which our liturgical and sacramental practice affords us a graced opportunity to embrace and imitate the Sacred. These I briefly describe in what follows. Although done in a bit of a “blue-sky” fashion to the extent that they provide some potential avenues for future exploration, they draw from some of the research currently underway.

Toward the Recovery of cosmic sacramentality

To the extent that contemporary areas such as embodiment, the ecology, gender, materiality, and so on are now being engaged in theological circles, the ancient Judeo-Christian appreciation for the material is alive and well. Whether pointing to the holiness of the human body or that of the cosmos – and here such theologians as Shawn Copeland (2010), Alejandro García-Rivera (2003), and Bruce Morrill (1999) come to mind – these works are responding to the Spirit’s invitation to pay attention to the signs of the times. The emerging interdisciplinary fields of cultural and ritual studies, gender studies, sensory studies, and others are reminding theologians of the importance of the material in our connection with the Sacred.

A deeper acknowledgement of the contributions of women to the sacramental theological enterprise

Much of the credit for this attentiveness to the material, the cotidiano or “daily stuff” of life and its connection to a larger spirituality, should go to Latina theologians such as the late Ada María Isasi-Díaz (2002), María Pilar Aquino (1993), and more recently Michelle A. González (2007) and Nancy Pineda-Madrid (2011), both of whose doctoral work was directed by the late Alejandro García-Rivera. While González brings us back to the feminine as *imago dei*, Pineda-Madrid, in describing the symbols and rituals of resistance on the part of the women in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, to appalling recent femicide, reminds us that true sacramental theology is never divorced from present-day suffering and salvation. A collection of previously published pieces by Latina theologians, *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology: Religion and Justice* (Aquino, Machado, and Rodríguez 2002), provides a beneficial and ecumenical background to this relationship. Particularly because they are often in touch with grassroots communities of women and men, these types of writings will continue to fill a void in the academy.

Further ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue

As mentioned previously by Stevens-Arroyo, ecumenical sensitivities around liturgy and sacraments have prevented Latino/a theologians from addressing some of these concerns; for example, the uncomfortableness many feel around the issue of who may be admitted to the Eucharistic table, particularly in a culture which places a high priority on hospitality. At the same time, much progress has been made if one takes into account the way our worship is enacted today. As I wrote in 2009:

In the case of those Christians belonging to more liturgical denominations such as Roman Catholics, Methodists, Episcopalians, Lutherans, and Presbyterians, ecumenism has contributed a great deal toward a liturgical revival, much of it based on historical research about the early church, which surfaced particularly after Vatican II. In some ways, in regards to Roman Catholics who often tended to privilege Sacrament over Word, the mutual enrichment of ecumenical dialogue and occasional shared worship has enhanced the prominence of both. Protestants have become more versed in Sacrament, evidenced by attention paid to more frequent Eucharistic celebrations, the revision of liturgical texts, and the redesign of church architecture to give more prominence to the Eucharistic table and baptismal font. At the same time, Roman Catholics have rediscovered the power of the Word through such means as proclamation and study in the language of the people, an inclusion of Scripture passages in all sacramental celebrations, equal reverence paid to the Word at Eucharistic celebrations in terms of gesture and architecture, as when the Lectionary, which contains the readings for the service, is enthroned in a place of dignity and respect. (Fernández 2009: 685–6)

Toward a fuller inculturation of the liturgy

In his 2012 work *Latino Catholicism: Transformation in America's Largest Church*, Timothy Matovina, writing about worship and devotion, describes the gift of cultural affirmation being experienced by Latino/a communities in the United States around such celebrations as that of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Especially in the case of some groups whose indigenous heritage has been ridiculed or ignored, the presence of indigenous dress, music, and *danzantes* often makes these liturgies electrifying. He quotes a parishioner, Alvaro Dávila, a native of Guatemala whose ecclesial experience in the United States and theological studies led him to return and do ministry in his native land. As Matovina reports: "His questions and profound experience at Mass that Sunday taught him that 'to be spiritual' involves getting 'reconnected with my roots, with the source of my life'" (Matovina 2012: 163). The author continues, "He [Dávila] calls this reconnection nothing less than a conversion, but not in the typical sense of leaving behind one's former self to become someone new. His transformation was just the opposite: it enabled him to embrace the beauty and dignity of his family, his ancestors, and of himself, even the indigenous part of him that he had been conditioned to conceal and despise" (Matovina 2012: 163). The theology behind such liturgical practices which embrace and celebrate people's identity needs to be further explored.

In like manner, to what extent are we aware of and celebrate the various African, Indigenous, and Iberian strands which shape contemporary Latino/a culture, to say nothing of the North American cultural blends we are experiencing? Might a meticulous study of certain practices by scholars trained as both liturgists and ethnographers, such as Raúl Gómez Ruiz' work *Mozarabs, Hispanics, and the Cross* (2007), be exactly the harsh kind of *ressourcement* we need to further explore the theological insights kept alive through these cultural practices?

Toward a more tangible promotion of faith in the service of justice

Similar to the liberative contributions of the Latinas already cited, concern for culture, particularly in the case of Latin America, is in no way separated from the quest for justice. Given the cruel realities of the Conquest, with its subsequent *mestizaje*, the brutal bringing of slaves to the New World (often resulting in *mulatéz*), and the massive conversions which took place at this time, especially at the time of the *Patronato Real*, the theological could not be separated from the political. As Stevens-Arroyo notes, "Latin American theology during the baroque conjoined the aesthetic, syncretistic, cultural and historical realities of Latin Catholicism with a strong sense of social justice" (2009: 732).

But this concern is not limited to the baroque era but rather a strain throughout Latin American history. Even in the United States, the presence of such collections as *Latino Religions and Civic Activism in the United States* (Espinosa, Elizondo, and Miranda 2005) reminds us that worship and symbol among the diverse Latino/a communities

will continue to produce the next generation of people like César Chávez, who led the farmworkers' pilgrimages with the banner of Our Lady of Guadalupe, or faith-based activists who participated in the sanctuary movement in the 1980s and 1990s, or the "Warrior Ladies" of Latino/a Pentecostalism in New York City. In the words of the dedication by Espinosa, Elizondo, and Miranda, they are, and will continue to be, the "thousands of women and men who have taken their faith to the streets in order to create a better society."

Note

- 1 "Sacramentals," which are not the same as "sacraments," are material symbols such as water, ashes, palms, medals, candles, etc. which often appear in Catholic popular religion or religiosity. They often point back, as in the case of holy water used to bless oneself, to official ones such as Baptism, or blessed bread on Holy Thursday echoing the Eucharist.

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PART III

Theologizing Latino/a Realities

CHAPTER 16

Mestizaje

The Latina/o Religious Imaginary in the North American Racial Crucible

Jorge A. Aquino

According to Mexican tradition, the Virgin Mary – popularly known as *La Virgen de Guadalupe* – appeared in 1531 to a recently converted Aztec elder named Juan Diego. The mission she gave him, and the miraculous events that supposedly transpired, are regularly presented as inaugurating the post-Colombian Christianization of the Américas with a divine revelation indicating God's intentions for the New World. The apparition tradition is a staple of US Latino/a religious veneration, giving rise to a series of ethno-racial and cultural identifications linking Latin American and Latin@ Christians to an otherwise Eurocentric Christian faith. For US Latin@s, especially Mexicans and other Central Americans, Guadalupe is the basis for their self-understanding as a *mestizo* people, mixed race and broadly inclusive in a way that manifests the frontiers of the eschatological Reign of God in history. Latin@ theologians have grounded their cultural theologies in ideas of *mestizaje* and on the role of a mixed race Mary in the foundation of the American Christian conscience. Such identifications are deeply held – and fiercely fought over.¹

But at the risk of posing what may seem like an unserious, if not blasphemous, question: *What race was she?* Did this woman of superhuman grandeur, this Virgin of Guadalupe, appear in the guise of a *mestiza*, a *criolla*, or an *indígena*? Today Latin@ Christians commonly represent Mary either as a *mestiza* or as *india*. But the bedrock narrative of the Guadalupan tradition – the 1648 text by the Oratorian preacher Miguel Sánchez (1999) – represents Mary as the first *criolla* of the Américas. The second major text in the tradition – Luis Lasso de la Vega's "Huei Tlamahuízólitica" (1999)² – presents her as speaking to Juan Diego in the ancient Mesoamerican tongue of Nahuatl, suggesting she was manifesting, at least linguistically, as an *Indian Mary*. (The text is silent on whether Mary bore the *appearance*, in dress or phenotype, of an Indian woman.)

Such anomalies in the tradition prompt odd questions about the everyday interlacings of religious faith, ethno-racial identity, and historical experience. How does a tradition that begins with a creole heroine morph so that today, nearly five centuries after her supposed apparition, she is regularly represented as either *mestiza* or *indígena* – but hardly ever as *criolla*? What are we to say about a “historical” apparition whose tradition is so wont to self-centered revisioning? Can Mary be *india*, *criolla*, and *mestiza* – all things to all people? And if those identifications correspond to divisive latter-day nationalism or tribalisms, what about the singularly Latin@ theologeme of *mestizaje*, which proposes an eschatological fellowship figured in the felicitous earthly language of miscegenated love? Can such a polymorphous deity really be said to have “appeared” – with all the *particularity* that the bodily apparition of a resurrected human might be expected to show?

I would approach these questions by suggesting that the Virgin Mary – like much of the Christian imaginary Latin@s have produced since the mid-1980s – is caught in the whirl of the North American racial crucible. This chapter assesses the racialized condition of Latin@ religious identity by way of a review of expressions on the theme of *mestizaje* in Latin@ theological writing. I consider three stages of development in the thinking. The first stage (1980–99) coincides with the birth of “Latino/a theology,” in writings from theologians rooted in diverse cultural backgrounds and situations – Mesoamerican, South American, and Caribbean. In a period of development marked by a mix of scholarly marginality and a certain spirit of insurgency, these early expressions of *mestizaje* express a quasi-nationalism that is important to consider as a counter-narrative to the liberation theology we Latina/o theologians often profess as the horizon of our work – and our faith (see Aquino 2006). This period is dominated by the thinking of Virgilio Elizondo, centered in a distinctly Mexican American vision of the *mestizo/a*, one in which even Cuban-descended theologians participated, often uncritically. The second period – unfolding since the early 2000s or so, and still ongoing – involves a critical revisioning of the idea of *mestizaje* in light of a generation of new insights from the social sciences: particularly critical race studies, cultural, and ethnic studies. The third stage, which is just beginning to unfold, involves a rethinking of theological *mestizaje* in light of Chicana theory and queer theory. These approaches promise a broad liberation of the thinking on *mestizaje*, and Latino/a cultural and religious formation, but also portend formidable critical challenges around future anti-racist political activism on behalf of Latin@ communities in the United States.

I close with a proposal for rethinking the Latin@ theological commitment to *mestizaje*, based on a long-historical reading of racism as an ideological girder in the formation of the political economies of Western modernity. Consistently with much of the recent critical writing on race, I argue that the use of *mestizaje* as a positive cultural identification has risks and rewards. The principal reward is that it offers a self-affirming, more or less recognizable cultural trope for Latino/as to hold onto as a lingua franca for everyday forms of community – including the communion of faith – as well as for campaigns and movements of social-justice activism, labor, and community organizing. The main risk is that the discourse of *mestizaje*, in particular communities, has the potential to function as a racially exclusionary ideological force. In privileging certain representations of the “*mestizo*” or “*mestiza*,” a community may end up marginalizing other elements in the supposedly

inclusive *mestiza* community. This dark side of *mestizaje* is a commonly experienced phenomenon of exclusion, one that falls with particular force on pure-blood indigenous and Afro-descended peoples. And while the discourse of *mestizaje* was widely embraced by US Latin@ theologians of Caribbean descent, this has taken place despite the fact that social movements self-identifying as “*mestizo*” are all but unknown in the Spanish Caribbean.

Two Tropes of *Mestizaje*

The major challenge of a concept like *mestizaje* is that it functions, sometimes at cross-purposes, in two categories of Latin@ theological reflection. In the first place it functions as a trope of identity, offering a positive grammar and an ethnically distinct *color* to Latino/a faith discourse. As identity trope, *mestizaje* purports to mark the North American signature of *Latinidad* in Latino/a theology: its diversity of sources, the hybridity of Latino/a cultures, and a subaltern racial perspective. In the second place, *mestizaje* operates as an analytical trope, a perspective on culture itself – insisting on the essential dynamism and hybridity of cultures and cultural formation.³ It purports to describe the dynamics of bio-cultural formation in terms of *mixture*, *diversity*, *plurality/pluralism*, as against the supposed (Eurocentric) normality of monoracialism. In both functions – as identity trope and as analytic – *mestizaje* shapes Latin@ theology, and has sometimes functioned as a stamp of authenticity for particular theological expressions and perspectives. *Mestizaje* marks Latin@ theologies in opposition to North American and European theologies, which are seen as too monocultural, too Eurocentric, too ignorant of Latin American and US Latin@ history.

Because *mestizaje* plays a discursive role in the formation of political communities – whether historical *mestizo* or *ladino* communities, or *conjuntos teológicos* like the US Latin@ theological community – it enters into history as a hegemonic process. As discourse, *mestizaje* becomes wired into historical forms of power in the global political economy, and plays a role in the arbitration of power, conflict, and violence in society. The principal risk of an uncritical embrace of *mestizaje* is that once-minoritized racial groups will take power – say, as a *mestizo/a nation* – setting themselves up as the new dominant in a redrawn racial hegemony. This is the *gravamen* of much of the recent literature critiquing *mestizaje* as a new species of racial nationalism.⁴ In critiquing monoracialism with the claim that *mestizaje* represents a true liberation from the racial crucible, we still risk recapitulating a rac(ial)ism that *mestizaje* purported to have dissolved. That risk is neither incidental, accidental, nor small, but grows as an ineluctable dimension of racial formation in Western modernity. I propose grounding our “*mestizo*” theologizing in an understanding that race is a long-historical ideological apparatus fomented to create and discipline subaltern labor in the modern capitalist world-system. The only way theology can confront this risk – which may not finally be superable, either in scholarly practice or in activism – is to frontally critique capitalism as a system of exploiting and destroying racialized bodies. This approach is a far cry from the biologism that opens the thinking of *mestizo* theologies of the first generation (1980–99).

Mestizaje in First-Generation US Latino/a Theology

Virgilio Elizondo: the herald of mestizaje

While there are many foundations to the discourse of *mestizaje* in US Latin@ theology's first generation, the deepest roots were sunk by Virgilio Elizondo. A founder of the Mexican American Cultural Center (MACC) in San Antonio, an important center for Latino/a theological education and pastoral training, Elizondo also served for many years as rector of the San Fernando Cathedral, the capitol of South Texas' Latino/a Catholic community. A pastoral theologian with moorings in Latin American liberation theology,⁵ Elizondo's writings are some of the most widely cited contributions from Latino/a theology's first generation. Dubbed a "herald of U.S. Hispanic theology" (Fernández 2000: 38ff.), his work becomes definitive for setting the theme and tone for ethno-racial thinking in the field. He understands *mestizaje* in historico-cultural terms as the double miscegenation that marks Mexican history: first, the *mestizaje* between Spanish and indigenous peoples during the conquest and colonial periods; second, the Anglo Hispanic *mestizaje* that follows during and after the Mexican–American War of 1848. For Elizondo, "the future is mestizo," as the natural bio-cultural combining of peoples of mixed backgrounds produces populations that are ever more hybrid. The analogy of biological *mestizaje* becomes the platform for Elizondo's *mestizo* theology, which seems strongly inhabited by the eschato-logic of Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos (1882–1959).⁶ Vasconcelos conceived of Mexico as the model of the *raza cósmica* – the Mexican *cosmic race* – which he thought would become the template for the future evolution of the (mixed race) human race (Vasconcelos 1999). But Vasconcelos' cosmic race took a more Christian hue when wedded to Elizondo's thinking on Latin America's dark Virgin Mary – Mexico's *Virgen de Guadalupe*, the matrix of Mexican identity, its *patrona nacional*. Between Mary and Vasconcelos, Elizondo would lay the first track of thinking on the theme of *mestizaje*.

According to tradition – the most important Marian tradition in the Américas – Mary appeared in December 1531 to an elderly Aztec convert, Juan Diego, on Tepeyac hill outside México City. Speaking tenderly to him, as though she were his mother, Mary urged him to go before the bishop of México, Juan de Zumárraga, and convey her command that the bishop build a shrine in her honor there. After much back-and-forth, Mary procured a miracle to persuade the bishop of the authenticity of Juan Diego's embassy: she had the old man bundle a cloak-full of the roses growing at their feet – roses that *La Virgen* had caused to bloom there, unseasonably, in the chill highland air of Tepeyac in December. Opening the cloak before the bishop, Juan Diego unveiled an image of the virgin miraculously "painted" by the roses themselves on the *tilma*. Humbled by the sight, Zumárraga commissioned the shrine's construction. According to the *Nican Mopohua*, one traditional narrative of the apparition, "the entire city was excited" as the image was placed at the altar. "They came to see and admire the devout image and to pray. They marveled that it had appeared by divine miracle, because no person of this world painted its precious image" (Lasso de la Vega 1999: 297).

México's identification with Mary has deep roots, having stood as one of the pillars of Mexican nationalism – first, of seventeenth-century creole nationalism against Spain. Miguel Sánchez' 1648 narrative presents Guadalupe as the providential key to Spain's conquest of the "heathen idolatry" of the Indians. He and the creole preachers who would follow him imagined México as the epicenter of an eschatological drama by which God and Christ fought to vanquish Satan from his refuge on the outskirts of the known world (i.e. in Aztec-Toltec sacrificial religion). The *mestizo-centrism* of the independence period would take over the national discourse on Mary. After the Mexican Revolution, mainly through Vasconcelos, one finds the idealization of *mestizaje* channeled into Elizondo's theology.

There are four works in Elizondo's career worth commenting on with respect to the racial perspective in his theology: *Galilean Journey* (Elizondo 2000a [1983]), *The Future Is Mestizo* (Elizondo 2000b), his essay on *mestizaje* in the theological method (Elizondo 1989), and his book on Mary, *Guadalupe: Mother of the New Creation* (Elizondo 1997). Like Mexico's seventeenth-century creole preachers, Elizondo figures Mary as the center of an eschatological drama, but with a different skew: he takes Mary's apparition to Juan Diego as inaugurating an eschatology in which racial and cultural *mestizaje* – whose paradigm is the Indo-Spanish miscegenation that unfolded in México – plays a central role in opening human history to the Reign of God. He interprets *mestizaje* as a divine project, bringing once antagonistic races together into a common human family bonded by erotic, filial, and agapic love. Such love, he argues, defeats the "natural" proclivity of different racial groups to despise and fear one another. In effect, Elizondo's theology pivots on an analogy between mixed race groups in human history and the undivided human family Jesus envisioned in his preaching on the eschatological Reign of God. How does this work – and particularly how does his theology account for the historical racial violence of the conquest? In *Guadalupe: Mother of the New Creation* (Elizondo 1997), Elizondo reads the *Nican Mopohua* to emphasize not the divine election of conquerors, but the healing work of the divine Indian mother (Mary), who calls upon the Spanish father (Zumárraga) through the Indian Christian child (Juan Diego) to build a house in her honor. This call inaugurates a historical process of *mestizaje* and an eschatological "new creation" similar to Vasconcelos' *raza cósmica*. Elizondo criticizes the Eurocentric "spiritual conquest" that left early colonial *mestizos* and *Indios* spiritually dislocated and disabled. Guadalupe's healing hand was the remedy:

The inner re-creating power of Guadalupe, its anthropological reversal of the dynamics of the conquest, lies in the core of the "little story": the Indian Mother sends the Christian-Indian child to call the Christian father to become a home-builder. Mother, child, and father interrelate in a new way and together become the image and likeness of God. The divine image of God as loving relationships can finally be seen and experienced in the Américas and then become the basis of the new humanity. The integrity of the Mother, the rebirth of the conquered Indian, and the repentance of the conquering bishop give rise to the mestizo soul of the new humanity of the Américas. This will be the basis of mestizo spirituality: openness to everyone without exception. (Elizondo 1997: 107)

This is a benevolent rendering of the violent historicity of mixed race formation in México⁷ – a violence Elizondo’s theology recodes, not altogether without qualifications, under the category of “love.” In *Galilean Journey*, Elizondo presents a *mestizo* theology that winds two levels of experience – one anthropological, the other theological – into a synthetic understanding of the Mexican American contribution to US Latin@ religious identity. On the theological level he discerns in Jesus’ Galilean origins the roots of theological *mestizaje*, with its culture-diversifying dynamics of marginality, multiculturalism, and mixed race descent. These lead Elizondo to fashion a subversive theology of election: what human beings reject, God chooses. In Bethlehem, so Elizondo’s version of the story goes, God became incarnate to human history in a person of mixed, abjected origins; likewise, in modern times, the animus of God’s prophetic message arises from the despised and rejected Mexican American *mestizos* of the US. For Elizondo, the election of the *mestizo* does not merely spell deliverance from long-suffered marginality; it vests a messianic vocation in the *mestizo* people to transform a decadent and racist American society.

On the anthropological level Elizondo’s ideas about *mestizaje* are problematic. While he leverages *mestizaje* as the key to a North American, liberationist theology, Elizondo lays heavy emphasis on the biological roots of race. His theology deploys fragmentary elements of a *vulgar* evolutionary theory in a series of claims that appear to naturalize⁸ *mestizaje* as a process of diversification among otherwise homogeneous ethno-racial groups. He does not resort to social histories of race to situate the *mestizo* condition, but does have recourse to “anthropological laws of human behavior” that describe “the dynamics of *mestizaje*” (Elizondo 2000a: 17). While Elizondo does not view racism as an a-historical process,⁹ his work fails to focus on scenes of racial formation in Mexican and Mexican American history. Nevertheless, Elizondo’s writings on *mestizaje* become the standard narrative, ubiquitously cited, defining the ethno-racial dimension of US Latin@ theology.

“*Mestizo Christianity*”

Arturo Bañuelas’ 1995 publication *Mestizo Christianity: Theology from the Latino Perspective* is a landmark first-generation contribution, offering perspectives on *mestizaje* from theologians of Mesoamerican and Caribbean background (Bañuelas 1995a). Elizondo’s (1989) essay on “*mestizaje* as a locus of theological reflection” is a sort of keynote for the collection, and recaps much of the argument he had presented earlier in *Galilean Journey*. In his sweeping “initial assessment” of the first generation of US Latin@ theology, Bañuelas cites Elizondo as “the most prominent U.S. Hispanic theologian. What Gustavo Gutiérrez is to liberation theology, Elizondo is to U.S. Hispanic theology” (Bañuelas 1995b: 56). Bañuelas’ review of the sundry *loci* of theology show that most bear the trace of Elizondo’s influence. Conceiving Latino/a theology as born out of a double conquest – first the Spanish, later the Anglo American – he echoes Elizondo’s idea of the double miscegenation – Indo Spanish, Anglo *Mestizo* – that would mark

Latino/a experience. With Elizondo he affirms Mary of Guadalupe as the polyvalent sign of theological *mestizaje*. Theological *mestizaje* is also shaped by the Latino/a experience of being “a bridge people” (Bañuelas 1995b: 75) spanning the divisions in the Américas between North and South, developed and underdeveloped. For the Latino/a as *mestizo/a* to ask “Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:25) is to answer that everyone of every race is. “The *mestizo* partial mixture of races,” characteristic of Latino/a cultural life, “is a foretaste of a possible new universal harmony without boundaries” (1995b: 75). In moving from an idea of *mestizaje* to his border theology, Bañuelas again follows Elizondo.

Other contributors advance the idea of Latino/a theology as a *mestizo* theology in more original ways. Writing on the hybrid Latin@ experience of having “two places and no place on which to stand” (Segovia 1995), Fernando Segovia describes the Latin@ cultural complex as compelling a theology “characterized by a radical sense of mixture and otherness, of *mezcolanza* and *otredad*, both unsettling and liberating at the same time” (Segovia 1995: 31). Latino/as are “inherently and uniquely mixed – we are indeed a hybrid people, a *mestizo* and *mulato* people, whether in biological or cultural terms, or both.” He describes how “*mestizaje* and *mulatez* permeate our art, our music, our language, our food, our religion, our very way of constructing and functioning in the world” (1995: 32). On the other hand, the pan-ethnic formation called “Hispanic” or “Latino/a” involves much greater division, complexity, diversity, and conflict in cultural identity, political affiliation, and religion than *mestizaje* and *mulatez* might be said to unify. “We are thus not only a bicultural people but a multicultural people, the permanent others who are also in various respects others to one another” (1995: 35). These experiences of otherness and of cultural multiplicity should ground a theology “in our biological and cultural mixture, in our own *mestizaje* and *mulatez*, in our own expansive and expanding *raza*” (1995: 37).

Other contributors likewise write of *mestizaje* as an *e pluribus unum* describing US Latinidad and compelling the terms of diversity and otherness that should source theology. Samuel Soliván-Román writes that

a Hispanic American theology seeks to reflect critically and consciously from the perspective of our *mestizaje*. ... Our color, in its full spectrum from black to white, our language, our cultural heritage – drawn from the blood of our Spanish, African, Amerindian, and Anglo-American parents – are affirmed as gifts of grace and expressions of divine providence. (Soliván-Román 1995: 45)

Other writings from the mid-1990s make similar claims about *mestizaje*. Teresa Chávez Saucedo followed Elizondo in his figuring of *mestizaje* as a sign of cultural and biological diversity and multiplicity, innate in God’s design for creation, whose differences are to be reconciled by the divine counterforce of *love*. In society, *mestizaje* is a space between two already-formed cultural forms, a third space in which a novelty emerges that has the power to transform both pre-existing cultures.

To define *mestizaje* as “fully both and exclusively neither” implies in the definition that there are two distinct realities that exist on their own. Between these two realities, rather than building a wall that cannot be surmounted or a gap that cannot be bridged, *mestizaje* creates a new social space in which the mestiza/mestizo can move freely, openly, with a kind of dual cultural citizenship. (Chávez Saucedo 1997: 30)

Eliseo Pérez Álvarez affirmed the constructive potential of *mestizaje*, but also cited the risk that it could play an exclusionary role in an unwittingly racist politics.

While we prefer to use *mestizaje* rather than terms that call to mind vegetarian nomenclature – *la raza*, half-breed, cross-breed – we do acknowledge that the term has been associated with the oppression of the native people by the seventeenth-century *conquistadores* as well as by the oligarchies that ruled these lands. For this reason we need to take seriously Alberto Rembao’s observation on how the *mestizos*’ inferiority complex led us to exert a stronger cruelty over our own people than the cruelty whites exercised against them. (Pérez Álvarez 1997: 37–8)

Though he cites the possibility of such a risk, a critical assessment of this risk would not come for another decade or so – in framings we will examine in the next section of this chapter.

A number of noteworthy observations can be drawn from these citations. First, there is a real difference in expression between those theologians of Mesoamerican and those of Caribbean descent. The former (Elizondo, Bañuelas) tend to use *mestizaje* as both an analytical term and a term of self-identification. While Caribbean-descended scholars (Soliván, Segovia, and Espín) likewise use *mestizaje* as an analytic, they do not give themselves out as *mestizos* by descent or cultural identification. And even while all think of Africa as a constituent in this *mestizaje*, only Segovia will cite the term *mulatez* as an alternative to *mestizaje* – one perhaps more native to the Afro Caribbean experience.

Ada María Isasi-Díaz: mestizaje and mulatez

In the history of the theme of *mestizaje* in Latin@ theology, Ada María Isasi-Díaz plays a role as a figure of transition between the field’s first and second generations. First of all, Isasi-Díaz presents her recourse to ethno-methodology – which sources theology in interviews and relationships with living women caught up *en la lucha* (the everyday struggle for survival) – as compelled by the complex, plural worlds Latinas inhabit. This plurality of experience requires an understanding of *mestizaje* not only as a term of cultural identification or hermeneutic, but as a figure signifying the complex plurality of truth.

For Hispanic Women *mestizaje* is not only a paradigm and a hermeneutical tool for our theological praxis, but, because it is a symbol of our communities, it is also a symbol of

Hispanic Women's moral truth-praxis. ... By using *mestizaje*, therefore, as a symbol of our moral truth-praxis, we once again claim the experience of Hispanic Women as the source of our theology. (Isasi-Díaz 1993: 195)

As source, *mestizaje* signifies an integration of the diversity of Latinas' social, religious, and familial experience; as a dimension of praxis, *mestizaje* compels solidarity across difference, suggesting that "perhaps we need to consider subsuming *mulatez*, the mixture of black and white races that is a widespread reality in our communities, under 'mestiza'." She describes this broadened perspective as the portal to a true Latin@ ecumenism, by allowing us "to insist on a continuum of differences that not only permits diversity, but actually welcomes it" (Isasi-Díaz 1996a: 370).

In her *Mujerista Theology*, published that same year, Isasi-Díaz insists on a more essentialized expression, collapsing *mestizaje* and *mulatez* into a single figure – *mestizaje/mulatez* – signifying new sorts of racial mixing in North America, as well the shared intercultural experience among Latino/as that compels openness to cultural plurality and ethno-racial diversity. Here the terms are clearly expressed without any historical sense of their originary meaning. They function as theologies helping conceive "racism and ethnic prejudice as sin and the embracing of diversity as virtue" (Isasi-Díaz 1996b 65). Ethically *mestizaje-mulatez* signify not natural realities, but ethical choices compelled from the standpoint of oppressed peoples who are subjects of Anglo American racism and white supremacism. For Nestór Medina, who has written the most significant critical volume on *mestizaje* in the field to date (Medina 2009), this invocation of *mulatez* marks a shift in Isasi-Díaz' thinking. Earlier in her career Isasi-Díaz tended to adopt Elizondo's conceptualization of *mestizaje* with greater feeling for the historical meaning of the term. But from 1996 on "she abandons the original historical specificity of the initial *mestizaje-mulatez*. ... Here, while she echoes Elizondo's *second mestizaje* of the Anglo-dominant cultural group with the Mexican Americans, her vision is more far-reaching in scope, although still operating with a rigid view of *mestizaje* and *mulatez* as finished products" (Medina 2009: 54). For Medina this shift involves a problematic reduction.

She has managed to broaden the meaning of the term. Yet in part this has been possible only by neglecting the reality of exclusion and unique history of *mestizaje* and *mulatez*. By subsuming all other sorts of mixtures under *mestizaje/mulatez*, she uncritically reduces the term to its lowest level of signification. She treats *mestizaje* and *mulatez* as synonymous. But each term is the result of distinct socio-historical developments, which cannot be reduced to a superficial acknowledgment of the indigenous and African cultural heritage within the Hispanic culture. (Medina 2009: 56)

This turn in Isasi-Díaz' *mujerista* theology sparks a fractious debate, mostly among Cuban American theologians, on the role of mixed race identity in theological reflection.

Second-Generation Critique of *Mestizaje*: The Risks of Racial Nationalism in Theology

The second period critical to the evolution of *mestizaje* in US Latin@ theology begins to unfold in the early 2000s, with a series of critical writings informed by a deepening study of the cultural sourcings and portations of US Latin@ life, as well as insights from a growing literature on race from the social sciences of sociology, cultural studies, and ethnic studies. I will examine writings from five figures who exemplify the critical rethinking of *mestizaje* in Latino/a theology and religious studies: Miguel De La Torre, Michelle Gonzalez, Manuel Vásquez, Rubén Rosario-Rodríguez, and Néstor Medina. I close with my own proposal for a refiguring of *mestizaje* and *mulatez* in the long-historical context of the international division of labor in modern capitalism, a system that is colonial, neoliberal, and systematically racist.

Miguel De La Torre's Cuban American ajiao theology

Miguel De La Torre articulates a figuring for *mestizaje* explicitly vested in the trappings of Afro-descended Latin@ culture. One of the most prolific writers in Latin@ theology, Bible, and theological ethics, De La Torre has published three book-length works on trans-Cuban religious life since 2002 – including a Cuban “*ajiao*” Christology (De La Torre 2002, discussed later), a book on religious life in exilic Cuban Miami in the wake of the Elián González affair (De La Torre and Miguel 2003), and a student-friendly introduction to *Santería*¹⁰ in Cuba and the US (De La Torre 2004).

In a 2001 essay in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, De La Torre imagines the syncretic Afro Cuban figure of Ochún/Virgen de la Caridad as a symbol of reconciliation for the African and Christian in Cuban history, as well as for the never-ending Cold War between the island's socialist Cubans and Cuban American emigrés in the diaspora (De La Torre 2001). In Cuban history, Afro Cuban religion was as intrinsic to Cuban cultural consciousness as Christianity. The principal Afro Cuban religious figures – the *orishas*, loosely dubbed “saints” – were syncretically connected to, or masked behind, some Christian saint. The African orisha Changó, for example, is a deity of war-making, unbridled womanizing, and thunder; he is syncretically paired with St Barbara, a young woman who was beheaded with a sword by her own father after she refused to renounce her Christian faith (De La Torre 2004: 64–6). Ochún is syncretically linked to the Virgin of Charity, an apparition of the Virgin Mary who saves mariners lost at sea – a image tailor-made to appeal to Cubans on both sides of the shark-filled Florida straits. De La Torre identifies Ochún as a polymorphous deity with “many *caminos* [paths] to her” (De La Torre 2001: 847). She represents the capacity to bear with negatives – poverty and humiliation, the suffering of women and oppressed people – but also to enjoy sensuality, and to celebrate with joviality amid the mundane slings and arrows of *la lucha cotidiana* – the daily struggle. “Like life, she represents different aspects. She becomes a sacred space providing

metaphorical value within which Miami and La Habana can attempt to reconcile into one *cubanidad*" (De La Torre 2001: 849). In this reading of syncretic Afro Cuban religious symbols, De La Torre imagined a harmonization and reconciliation of deeply divided Cubans in a manner highly reminiscent of the *e pluribus unum* thinking of Elizondo's *mestizaje*.

In work published a year later, De La Torre undertakes the "search for the Cuban Christ," finding an "*ajiaco* Christ" whom he represents as a natively Cuban expression of *mestizaje* (De La Torre 2002). The *ajiaco* figure comes from the writing of famed Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, in a study reflecting on the integral place of black Cubans in the national fabric (Ortiz 1939). For Ortiz, the African presence in Cuba was not a matter of assimilation, or of the grafting of a foreign entity into an already established Hispanic Cuban culture. Instead Africans from a multitude of ethnic families, tribes, and languages were *blended* into a Cuban culture that was always already the fusion of many other world cultures – Indo European, Mediterranean, Arabo Islamic, Amerindian, African, and Asian. Those highly mixed subjects had been migrating to and from Cuba since the start of the sixteenth century – and indeed for centuries before 1492. For Ortiz, this ethno-racial complexity, begotten of Cuba's incessant labor migrations, made Cuba the society of *transculturations*.¹¹ Such diversity became a preoccupation in the decades following the Spanish–American War (1898), as Cubans struggled to unite a racially complex and conflicted nation. Ortiz fashioned one of the most historically resonant responses to this challenge, promoting a multiracial Cuban "civilization" in which each constituent – especially Afro-descended Cubans – would be recognized and integrated into the national fabric. He was famous for insisting that *sin el negro, Cuba no sería Cuba* – without Blacks, Cuba would not be Cuba (Ortiz 1993). Ortiz used the metaphor of a homespun Cuban stew – *ajiaco* – to describe the cultural fusion he saw taking place in Cuban nationalism after 1898. In this very typical Cuban dish, any number of meats, potatoes, vegetables, and seasonings are simmered into a flavorful blend whose taste transcends the trace of any particular ingredient. For De La Torre, "*ajiaco* symbolizes our *cubanidad*'s attempt to find harmony within our diverse roots" (De La Torre 2002: 121). Seasoning his christology with Ortiz's *ajiaco*, De La Torre represents Jesus as a migrant who began life – like so many exilic Cubans – as a refugee from the brutality of a despotic and jealous regime. Crossing frontiers that are cultural as much as geographical, Jesus and his family internalized the hybridity of their environs in crossings between the Galilee and Egypt, and back again. Like the hybrid Jesus of first-century Palestine, Cuba's representations of Christ are also hybrid. De La Torre figures the colonial Christ of the *conquistadores*; Cuban liberator José Martí as a sacrificial nationalist Christ; an Afro Cuban Christ "as a source of liberation from the sin of intra-Cuban racism"; a "Euroamerican Christ of imperialism"; a Communist "Christ of revolution"; and a Christ of the Cuban exile communities of the United States (De La Torre 2002: *passim*). He concludes with his constructive proposal for an "*ajiaco* Christ" who can "tie together all the diverse ways of understanding Christ from the underside of Cuban history" (De La Torre 2002: 114).

In a 2006 essay, De La Torre takes a sharper critical line on theological racialism, aiming a powerful broadside at Isasi-Díaz' figuring of *mulatez*. He calls out Isasi-Díaz as the sort of white Latino/a scholar who practices "internal hispanic racism" by poaching the cultural signifiers and trappings of racially subaltern subjects, especially Afro-descended people. In their expressions on *mestizaje* and *mulatez*, white Latin@ theologians offer whitewashed ideals of racial harmony, while simultaneously marginalizing black and indigenous Latin@s from the theological *conjunto* (De La Torre 2006: 159). Intrinsic to De La Torre's critique is his sense of the inescapably racist character of the term *mulato*,¹² which, along with *mestizo*, has always been deployed in an oppressively white-supremacist order. Even *mulatez* fails to describe the complexity of the multicultural/multiracial identities of Caribbean Latino/as. Including descendants of "five cultural inheritances" – African, Anglo, Asian, indigenous, and *mestizo* – they are "fully accepted by none of them, making us simultaneously 'outsiders' and 'insiders' on all sides." The use of *mulatez* by white Latino/as can *only* be reductive; just as *mestizaje* operates as "a 'colonizing' discourse directed against indigenous people" (De La Torre 2006: 163), invoked by *mestizos* who celebrate "indigeneity," but know little about indigenous cultures other than the pre-Columbian Aztecs, Maya, and Inca.

Although popular slogans like *mulatez* are constructed to describe the Americas' multiculturalism, white scholars like Isasi-Díaz romanticize the notion of *mestizaje* and *mulatez* ... Missing from her analysis is the existence of the transcript hidden among white Latino/as that a purer type of race mixing will be the result of miscegenation. The result of such a mixture is an acceptable "whiter" ethnic group that, by definition, excludes non-white Hispanics, especially those of pure African descent. *Mulatez* as a linguistic sign masks white Hispanics' rejection of *negritude* (black consciousness) as a viable ideology. *Mulato* and *mulatez* seek assimilation, a conciliatory rather than divisive response to racism. (De La Torre 2006: 167)

He calls the discursive turn to *mulato/mulatez* "the latest state of Latino/a racism" (2006: 170), in which *mulatez* is taken from its original racialized context and meaning in the Caribbean, and re-grafted into a North American racial economy. That lighter-phenotyped Latin@s apparently can embrace the African in their identities becomes cover for an argument that Latin@s are not inhabited by racist structures and ideologemes from the Caribbean or Latin America; any racism one finds in US Latin@ communities can conveniently be blamed on the Eurocentric/North American racial milieu. With the figure of *mulatez*,

the miscegenation of Latino/as from the Caribbean as signifier becomes an alibi for what is signified – that Hispanics live in racial harmony. *Mulatez* ceases to be a symbol, but rather becomes the very ideology of the absence of racism among Hispanics. ... The real meaning of the original linguistic sign *mulatez* is perverted, giving the public a new sign, even as the history of the original linguistic sign is erased. (De La Torre 2006: 171)

Powerful as this critique is, it is difficult to escape the feeling that De La Torre is going ballistic on a relatively minor critical issue – at least with respect to Ada María Isasi-Díaz. As mentioned in the preceding section, it is clear that Isasi-Díaz' discussion of *mestizaje-mulatez* deploys the concept as an anti-racist point of view, supposedly innate to the Latino/a sense of racial subalternity, which grounds the *mujerista* theological and ethical project. She specifies that this anti-racist sense requires an ethical decision, and is not just a natural condition such that it can foreclose intra-Hispanic racisms. While she may have fudged the distinction between *mestizaje-mulatez* as analytic and as social movement, and indeed made the racist genealogies of both terms disappear, this would be more a matter of critical error than racist animus. In this respect, her use of *mulatez* may be as sterile and inert as a mule, hardly the case of a white Latin@ passing as Afro-descended. And while a couple of voices in the field have spoken in passing of *mulatez* as a theologeme, it has not been widely embraced – either as analytic or as a self-referential term. It goes unsaid in De La Torre's analysis that the signifier for which Isasi-Díaz is best known is not *mulatez*, but *mujerista*. If we consider that *mujerista* is Isasi-Díaz' Hispanicized portation of Alice Walker's black-feminist figure of the *womanist*, then it would be fair to say that the real racial appropriation of Isasi-Díaz' theology is African American, not Afro Cuban. While María Pilar Aquino has criticized Isasi-Díaz for this portation, specifically on the ground that there are no *mujerista* historical subjects (Aquino 2002: 138–9), De La Torre does not mention this. In a sense he annuls Isasi-Díaz' foundational feminist contribution, ignoring it entirely while criticizing a relatively minor – perhaps failed – gesture to bring Latino/a theology's prior thinking on *mestizaje* into dialogue with the more Africanized milieu of Latin@s from the Hispanic Caribbean.

Michelle Gonzalez' Afro-Cuban Theology

The most ambitious, systematic, and wide-ranging new work toward a Cuban American theology was written by Michelle A. Gonzalez.. Her *Afro-Cuban Theology: Religion, Race, Culture, and Identity* pushes the interrogation of Latina/o religious identity in two directions (Gonzalez 2006). First, she offers pathways for retracking Cuban American identity through its marginalized Afro Cuban histories. Second, she examines the affinities, still too segregated, between Latino/a theologies and those of black liberationist and womanist theologians. Along the way she lays out a trenchant, though unfinished, critique of the Latina/o identity problematic. Gonzalez' chapter on identity knocks down the totemic Latino/a theological figure of *mestizaje*, rhetorically asking, "Are we all mestizos?" She answers that *mestizaje* reflects a Mexican American experience whose blindness to the Afro Latin amounts to a repression. Gonzalez describes this repression not so much in terms of the history of Mexican nationalism, or even so forcefully in terms of racism, as to recognize the unfortunate *whitening effect* of the discourse of *mestizaje*. Even more "perplexing," Gonzalez writes, is the fact that Cuban American

theologians have played a leading role both in elaborating *mestizaje* and in neglecting Cuba and its blackness. Certainly there are figures – Isasi-Díaz, Segovia, and De La Torre – who developed alternative, Afro-aware identity tropes (*mulatez*, *ajiaco* identity, hybridity, and so on). But the specifics of Afro Cuban history and identity have remained largely outside the discussion in both Latino/a and black theologies.

Challenging the normativeness of Mexican-American experience within Latino/a theology can lead to an examination of the African elements in Latino/a culture. Hopefully such an examination will, in turn, open pathways of dialog and collaboration between black and Latino/a theologians. Within black theology the Afro-Latin is glaringly absent. Collaboration is vital to the exploration of this topic, and such exploration may very well force the transformation of understandings of black and Latino/a identities presently functioning within these theologies. (Gonzalez 2006: 33)

While Gonzalez is clear that we are *not* all *mestizos*, she is less clear on why so many Cuban American theologians have written *as though we were*. The answer is complicated, involving painful, even shame-filled feelings about the political, cultural, and ideological distances that separate Cuban Americans from knowledge of Cuba – as well as the age-old distances that separate white Cubans from knowledge of their racialized others. She proposes the well-known axiom of Cuban folklorists Fernando Ortiz and Lydia Cabrera: that Cuba is unknowable without awareness of its African component. Applying that maxim in the North American context, Gonzalez argues that neither Latino/a nor African American cultures are fully intelligible absent reflection on their Afro Latin constituents. This principle orients Gonzalez' critique of black theology ("Are Afro-Latins Black? The Construction of Blackness in Black Theology" is one of her chapter titles), which she says construes "blackness" only in terms of the US black/white racial paradigm, the historic antagonism between African and Anglo Americans, or (as Victor Anderson puts it) in terms of *ontological blackness*.

Most often, when black theologians refer to black experience and black religiosity, they refer exclusively to the African-American community. The sources of their theologies and the contemporary experiences illuminated by them evince a limited understanding of blackness. The nomenclature of black theology implies that black theologians represent *the* black experience in the United States. In fact, they only represent *a* black experience in the United States. (Gonzalez 2006: 41)

Missing from the black theologian's history of black America, she writes, is the Afro-Latin subject. Some theologians – namely Anderson and Anthony Pinn – have cast for more transnational or trans-Atlantic sourcings for black theology. Clearly, Latino/a theologians who take Afro-Latinidad seriously can do the same, while also entering into a necessary dialogue with womanist and black liberation theologies.

Though the problematic of racial segregation is implied everywhere in her work, Gonzalez seems to underestimate its power to limit community and collaboration between members of every constituency with a stake in the question of Latino/a religious identity: the manifold of Latino/a communities, as well as North American Blacks. Both receive strong critical rebuke in her writing for their differing myopias concerning black Latino/as; yet historical racial segregation would persist precisely as this sort of myopia. Gonzalez' own standpoints on race and Cuba are not immune from blind spots. This is clear when considering the central chapter in her book, on "Cuban/Cuban-American identity: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives." Here she makes the case that Cuban American identity has always involved black experience, and that scholarship must dismantle "the myth of a politically and culturally homogeneous Cuban-American community," with its beliefs "that post-Castro Cubans were the first Cubans to arrive in the United States and that all Cuban-Americans are white" (Gonzalez 2006: 75). To do so she submits her writing to its greatest risks, compressing the notoriously complex history of Cuba – in its ecclesial, cultural, and racial dimensions – into a single chapter reviewing a few representative figures on the question of Cuban racial identity: the "apostle" of Cuban Independence, José Martí; Fernando Ortiz, the white Cuban anthropologist of Afro Cuban culture; the Afro Cuban poet and essayist Nicolás Guillén; the Afro Cuban-American writer Evelio Grillo (who lived the pitiable double segregation of Afro-Latino/as during the Jim Crow era); and the contemporary Cuban American novelist Cristina García. Each of these figures has something to say in the story Gonzalez tells, but the resultant image of Afro Cuba remains abstract and ambiguous. That may be why this impressive text still reads like an outsider's history of Afro Cuba, an exilic Cuban American's attempt to realize a more transcultural understanding of Cuban religiosity.

Gonzalez' work generally needs to make a clearer distinction between race, ethnicity, and culture. In her concluding chapter, she writes that

black and Latino/a are nonexclusive categories. It is misleading to locate the two terms within the same rhetorical framework. The term "black" refers to race; the term "Latino/a" refers to ethnicity. Apples and oranges. Just as Latino/a ethnicity includes a variety of races, the black race includes a variety of ethnicities and cultures. (Gonzalez 2006: 145–6)

This gets us to the point of accepting the need for more mutually inclusive interpretations of "black" and "Latino/a" identities. But it also *essentializes* race, and fails to recognize that "Latino/a" often operates as a racial trope – ask Mexicans and Central Americans on the receiving end of anti-immigration rhetoric – while "black" may equally function as a cultural trope. Fundamentally, the social boundaries that limit the transculturation of black, Afro Cuban and Latino/a identities are drawn through *racializing* operations meant to orient diverse "minority" populations to their subordinate and separate roles in the construction of a *white* nation – whether that be the Cuban nation or the *Yanqui* nation. In other words, racism *rules* cultural formation as the power to

inscribe the discursive limits of culture. For “Latino/a” theology, those discursive limits have manifested in the silence around Cuba and Cuban Africanity. For black theology, they manifest in the invisibility of the Afro Latin. In Gonzalez’ theology they perhaps manifest as silence on the question of what makes “white” power the invisible hand in the formation of Cuban and North American nations. The point is that minority ethnicities – especially in the US – are *racialized* entities, just as much as “races” are. The “Latino/a” is racialized, just as is a “black” or “Afro Cuban” subject, but according to different rules of racial formation. These issues reflect the challenged situation of the second-generation Cuban American theologian seeking to articulate a critical discourse of Latin@ identity in the racialized North America milieu. Those critical limits aside, *Afro-Cuban Theology* remains the most important constructive enterprise the field has produced on hybrid Cuban American ethno-racial and theologico-religious identities.

Manuel Vázquez: “Rethinking Mestizaje”

The most contextual and sociologically informed critique of *mestizaje* in its portations to theology came in a short contribution from Manuel Vázquez, “Rethinking *Mestizaje*” (Vásquez, 2006). There he examines several sites in Latin American history in which the discourse of *mestizaje* functioned – beyond any ethical intentions – as an exclusionary racial ideology, usually on behalf of a population that called itself *mestizo*. He begins by noting his Salvadoran ancestry, from a nation “where *mestizaje* is a dominant national ideology,” so well established that the adults of his childhood would regularly parrot the truism that in El Salvador “‘there are no *indios*. They mixed with white Spaniards and so we are all *mestizos*. We are all Salvadorans’” (Vásquez 2006: 129). He notes that this “truth” is paved with the bodies of many thousands of indigenous Salvadorans who were massacred in infamous events like *La Matanza* (massacre) of 1932. Clearly there are dangers in the discourse of *mestizaje*, but Vázquez aims “not to jettison *mestizaje*, but to historicize and contextualize it” (2006: 130).

On empirical grounds alone, it is difficult to justify a unifying discourse of *mestizaje* over Latin@ populations that are becoming more diverse and differentiated. Latino/a populations in 2000 were less white – or less self-identified as such – than two decades previously. And while Latino/as traditionally had been concentrated in urban areas, a generation of slow decline in American manufacturing, abetted by labor outsourcing from third world sources, has fomented a shift in settlement patterns from cities to non-traditional states in the midwest and the south, where agricultural and food-packing industries abound (Vásquez 2006: 130–5). This complexity, visible in new patterns of Latin@ settlement, grows out of a proliferation of transnational migratory circuits across the Américas.

Now more than ever, the picture of U.S. Latinos as a fairly homogeneous, Catholic, Spanish-speaking urban population is misleading. What does this increasing diversity and complexity

of Latino lives mean for Latino/a theologies, theologies that, as Ada María Isasi-Díaz tells us, are concerned with *lo cotidiano*, the daily experiences and struggles of our communities? Can the concept of *mestizaje* reflect and respond to the evolving nature of U.S. Latino life? (Vásquez 2006: 135)

While not answering the question, Vásquez sketches a series of cautionary tales of sites in which the proud declaration of *mestizaje*, or of a *mestizo/a* people, led to violent forms of exclusion against those who did not quite fit the bill as *mestizo/as*. Nationalism in Nicaraguan history, for example, is marked by a process of “*ladinoization*” – *ladino* being one of the Central American synonyms for *mestizo*. This included “symbolic violence” with campaigns to discredit indigenous identity and culture, as well as “‘real violence,’ including land expropriation and coerced labor” (Vásquez 2006: 145). Ladino elites further leveraged the salience of national ideals of citizenship and equal rights to undercut the claims of indigenous communities to their ancestral lands (2006: 145–6, quoting Gould 1998). Vásquez also cites work from anthropologist Charles Hale examining the deployment of *mestizaje* discourse in Guatemala by Ladino elites there bent on undercutting the pan-Mayanism taking root in the country – even Ladino intellectuals with demonstrated commitments to Latin American postcolonial and subaltern studies projects. “The net result of these critiques of the pan-Maya movement is to prevent any debate on the persistent racism and political and economic exclusion that indigenous people in Guatemala suffer at the hands of *Ladinos*” (Vásquez 2006: 148).

Rubén Rosario-Rodríguez: Racism and God-Talk

In his 2008 book, *Racism and God-Talk: A Latino/a Perspective*, Rubén Rosario-Rodríguez offers a highly nuanced critique of racism in Latin@ theology that simultaneously affirms the self-identifying/self-authenticating claims of *mestizaje*. He notes that the term “has come under scrutiny for uncritically adopting essentialist notions of race and ethnicity, for glossing over the ethnic and cultural diversity within U.S. Hispanic experience, and for contributing to the insularity of U.S. Latino/a theology.” He cites the theological genealogy of *mestizaje* as reaching Elizondo through Vasconcelos and the Chicano theologian Andrés Guerrero (Guerrero 1987).¹³ In particular, Rosario-Rodríguez traces to Vasconcelos a key risk in Elizondo’s *mestizo* theology: its propensity to recode “the horrific realities of *mestizaje* in Latin America (violent conquest, rape, and genocide of entire peoples) through the hermeneutical lens of eschatological hope” (Rosario-Rodríguez 2008: 76). This reduction harbors a “cultural essentialism ... that undermines emancipatory political action because it does not adequately call the Latino/a community to conversion.” Rosario-Rodríguez adds that “by grounding his discussions of *mestizaje* in a framework of evolutionary biology,” Elizondo “risks impeding his project’s liberative goals” (2008: 92). The biologicistic turn in Elizondo’s thinking

undercuts the eschatological vision of a new identity grounded in Christ that transcends all other identities without negating them. In other words, the liberating aspect of embracing our mixed biological heritage ... can quickly become an ethnocentric nationalism. (Rosario-Rodríguez 2008: 94)

However, Rosario-Rodríguez expressed optimism “that the metaphor of *mestizaje* can serve as a transcultural paradigm for resisting racism in our increasingly globalized society” (2008: 70). Part of that assurance comes from reviewing Isasi-Díaz’ turn from a more *biologistic* figuring of *mestizaje* – *per* Elizondo – to an *ethical mestizaje* in her *mujerista* thinking:

When considering Isasi-Díaz’s contributions toward a theological understanding of *mestizaje*, it is important to highlight her emphasis on moral agency. ... By grounding Latino/a social identity in the individual’s act of solidarity (in the context of building community), Isasi-Díaz opens the door toward a transcultural understanding of *mestizaje*, since group identity no longer depends solely upon biological heritage but is the result of moral and political choice. (Rosario-Rodríguez 2008: 98, 100)

Rosario-Rodríguez’ gesture toward a transcultural thinking of *mestizaje* apparently seeks to bend *mestizaje* toward convergence with its discursive *other* – Fernando Ortiz’ notion of *transculturation*.¹⁴ Noting three inflections of the term *mestizaje* in US Latin@ theology – a biologistic, a cultural, and a theo-ethical – Rosario-Rodríguez seeks a cultural understanding of *mestizaje*, and specifically an understanding of what conditions would beget and support the sort of liberating *mestizo/a* culture that is not reducible to a merely biological figuring of culture. Rosario-Rodríguez seems committed to the idea that *mestizaje* must finally foment a mixed society based on ethical commitment, rather than on biological, racial, or cultural identification. The decisive agent for him is the theo-ethical inflection of *mestizaje*, particularly in its possible Christian expression.

So while *mestizaje* is at its core the mixing of different cultures, its theological use entails a spiritual conversion from the old way of viewing human relationships as relationships of domination (the “us” versus “them” dichotomy) to a new, Christ-centered vision of human relationships as a “discipleship of equals” (Fiorenza) where “there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female.” (Rosario-Rodríguez 2008: 109)

From here Rosario-Rodríguez constructs a richly systematic, Chalcedonian theology, rethinking the *imago Dei* through Latino/a readings of the Virgin of Guadalupe; meditating on the egalitarian political ethics of the *mestizo* Christ; and imagining the spirit of a community that recognizes in the suffering of most of the world not just “others,” but “our sisters and brothers – people to whom and for whom we are responsible” (Rosario-Rodríguez 2008: 234, quoting Isasi-Díaz 2001). More than any other writer in the field,

Protestant or Catholic, Rosario-Rodríguez has integrated a nuanced, wide-ranging critique of *mestizaje* discourse into a systematic Christian theology that is recognizably Latino/a, and which organically integrates the theme into a range of Christian theological *loci*: God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the *mestizo* faith community called “Church.”

Néstor Medina’s *mestizaje*

Where Rosario-Rodríguez offers a wide-ranging theology of *mestizaje*, Néstor Medina presents *mestizaje* by way of a critical survey of the hazards of the racist turn in theology. Introducing first-time readers and specialists alike to the relevant sources and *loci* of *mestizaje* and its theological inspirations, Medina’s *Mestizaje: (Re)Mapping Race, Culture, and Faith in Latina/o Catholicism* (2009) is a landmark work. Its many gifts of critical reflection offer a powerful foundation for rethinking key themes and debates about race and culture that inform Latin@ Catholicism. In this respect his book truly attempts a “re-mapping” of the dialectics of “race, culture, and faith.” Medina’s concern with the ideological skew of theological discourse – like Manuel Vásquez’ in “Rethinking *Mestizaje*” – opens the path to a wholesale reordering of our theology through a more historicized interpretation of the US Latin@ culture in its larger pan-American contexts.

Medina introduces *mestizaje* in Latino/a theology by a survey of four writers – Virgilio Elizondo, Roberto Goizueta, María Pilar Aquino, and Ada María Isasi-Díaz – whom he blasts for “uncritical and romantic assumptions about *mestizaje*” (Medina, 2009: 25). Each figure undergoes sharp criticism for the ways their sugar-coated theological discourse of *mestizaje* severs the historical memory of the violence of *mestizaje*, in its role as a nationalist ideology in different settings in the Américas. He critiques Elizondo for the transcendental turn that conceives *mestizaje* as a divinely grounded *anthropological* law whose horrific human toll nevertheless serves an eschatological purpose. “By seeing the divine as the impetus of the reality of intermixture, the violence, genocide, and atrocities of any intercultural encounter can be explained away: at worst as a necessary evil, and at best as collateral damage. Stated this way, *mestizaje*-as-intermixture, including the violence with which it happened, is divinely sanctioned” (Medina 2009: 35). Goizueta and Aquino are critiqued for generic failure to historicize the contexts of *mestizaje* discourse in Latin American history, and for readings of *mestizaje* as *inclusiveness* that, perversely, tend to “promote the whitening and de-indigenization of the African descendants and indigenous populations correspondingly” (Medina 2009: 45).

Through their uncritical totalizing and idealized assumptions, U.S. Latina/o theologians reify *mestizaje* as having the capacity to remove homogenizing and racist tendencies. The same idealized assumptions about *mestizaje* play a significant role in blinding U.S. Latina/o theologians to self-reflective analysis of the particular racial tensions that exist among the U.S. Latina/o communities. (2009: 25)

Medina acknowledges that these first-generation figures were writing their theologies in something of a void – using *mestizaje* “to open the space for giving discursive theological context to the Latina/o communities’ experiences and expressions of faith.” However,

they failed to identify the tensions and contradictions engendered by the use of the term. ... Though sometimes they spoke of *mestizaje* in terms of inclusion and preservation of diversity, in their writings the indigenous peoples and African Latina/o peoples are absent. ... These theologians failed to examine critically the historical baggage of violence, its inherent logic of exclusion, and its seductive yet destructive facade of inclusion, effectively hiding the presence of racism among U.S. Latina/os. (2009: 59)

He proposes that Catholic Latina/o theology diversify its sourcings, *loci*, and conversation partners beyond Catholic and even beyond Christian concerns and sources – and certainly toward dialogical relations with the ethno-racial constituencies it has previously excluded. Even beyond dialogue with other “world” religions, Latino/a theologians must source the voices of other Latin American religious communities of African or indigenous descent. Medina offers as his example his chapter reviewing expressions of *mestizaje* in Mexican and Chicana@ cultures from Vasconcelos to Gloria Anzaldúa – one of the few serious engagements with Chicano/a theory in the larger field of Latin@ theology. Part of his proposal involves a call for Latino/a theology to abandon the thematization of *mestizaje*, in favor of a thinking of culture and liberation by the light of intercultural philosophy. In this sense, Medina proposes to supplant *mestizo/a* theology not with a *transcultural* perspective – like that proposed by Rosario-Rodríguez – but with an *intercultural* one, after the proposal of Raúl Fornet-Betancourt that “interculturalism seeks to promote interchange among cultural groups rather than absolutizing” (Medina 2009: 132, paraphrasing Fornet-Betancourt 1994).

Proposal: Reframing the Critique of *Mestizaje* as a Critique of Capitalism

Having reviewed major gestures and debates over *mestizaje* in two generations of theological writing, where do we go from here? The critical pushback on *mestizaje* poses some deeply challenging questions. In effect we must continue to ask – as with *la Virgen de Guadalupe* at the outset – *What is the rac(ial)ist lineage of mestizaje?* How do we describe the psychosomatic kernel of interest that animates this turn in Latin@ faith discourse to a *racial* figuring of identity? What are we to do in the face of the consistent testimony of recent critical studies on race indicating that the supposedly inclusive discourse of *mestizaje* forever risks redoubling into a more insidious and transparent breed of racism and exclusionary practice? What do we Latin@ thinkers do with the discovery that *mestizaje* may implicate us in *racism of a different color* – intra-Hispanic racism – in Latin@ communities? How do Latin@s in the US – especially those of us who pass among Anglo

North Americans as *whites of a different color*¹⁵ – avoid or transform racially exclusionary interpellations of *mestizaje*?

If there is an ideological fault line to observe in the critique of *mestizaje* – the seam through which racism may seep into an ostensibly race-neutral or anti-racist discourse – it's the line that splits *mestizaje* discourse between *identity* claims and *analytical* claims. As analytic, *mestizaje* can interpret racial reality in terms of bio/cultural mixture. As a theologeme, *mestizaje* signifies the complexity, plurality, and diversity of cultures, beliefs, and popular religious practice: the *interculturality* or *transculturalisms* one sees in human cultures and their religious movements. As identity claim, *mestizaje* signifies communities and social movements that identify themselves as *mestizo* or *mestiza* – typically in terms of a nation-state's official/authorized discourse of nationalism. As we saw in Néstor Medina's and Manuel Vásquez' rethinkings of *mestizaje*, the identifications and national moorings of *mestizaje* identity discourse are multiple, often contradictory, often exclusionary. In Latin@ theology, *mestizaje* begins as a critical, anti-racist analytic, but takes a subtle, ideological U-turn, becoming the all-but-transparent identity discourse of a whitened theological *conjunto* that does too little to promote the entrée of Latin America's truly *despised* cultures: the African and the Amerindian. I argue that this slippage between *mestizaje* as analytic and *mestizaje* as exclusionary identity banner for a whitened brand of US Latin@ theology results from the weak historical sensibility and theoretical apparatus that our field has brought to bear on the question of long-historical racism in the West.

Our first mistaken impulse is to counter the Manichean white supremacism of North American culture – which still figures race in *black and white* – with the *brown*¹⁶ identity discourse we call *mestizaje*. The painful, barely speakable question in the second-generation critique is whether our celebration of *mestizaje* turns us into *race sellouts* – *vendid@s* who have unwittingly capitulated to the exclusionary logic of white supremacism, accommodating ourselves to it with a faint identitarian critique.¹⁷ A more penetrating and prophetic critique is possible, however, if we dig deeper into the historical logic of North American and Latin American racism. The common engine in both regions is long-historical, transnational institution of *capitalism*, which forms the material foundation for the geo-cultures of Western modernity. Capitalism does not make sense merely by analysis of the *economics* of finance, labor, and trade; capitalism signifies a total *political economy* structured by militarized political institutions that even in “democratic” societies almost always obey the interests of capital social classes. “Capital” itself should be understood not merely as *money*, but as the *absolute wealth* that is spun – in highly concentrated form in the few hands of an ever-shrinking circle of *owners* – after productive processes have skimmed as “surplus” all the productive revenue that remains after wages and other productive costs have been paid. Capital is the wealth that makes it possible for those who possess it to live well without having to sell their labor for “wages.” Capital marks the fundamental economic and existential difference between *those who have* and *those who need*.¹⁸

Today, “capitalism” names a transnational political economy that, in capturing the leading political and cultural institutions and the repressive apparatuses of state,

imposes an inequitable distribution of the society's productive surplus on the majority, who constitute the class of workers. Historically speaking, modern global capitalism takes root in Europe's colonial enterprises in the geographical regions that today we call the "third world," or "Global South." The Spanish empire (1492–1650) was the first of these enterprises. In the history of the Spanish Américas, capitalism was imposed in the aftermath of the *encontrazo* between Spanish overlords and Amerindian populations. Its first institution was the notorious *encomienda* system – a plantation enterprise legally established by a Spanish royal license to stolen New World land and New World slaves. It is there in the *encomienda* that the racism of Western modernity has its root: an ideological construction designed to serve the economic interests of this nascent, slave-driven capitalism, and its lordly class of land- and slave-owners. The first major debates over human rights in the Indies turned on *racial questions*: of what nature were the indigenous inhabitants of the New World? "Do they not have rational souls?" as Dominican Friar Antonio de Montesinos put it in his famous broadside sermon (1511) against Spain's genocidal decimation of the Indians of *La Española* (Las Casas 2006). Did they have a "proper" "civilization"? Could Indians be educated and Christianized in the Spanish way, led to knowledge and faith in the "one true God" (Hanke 1974)? Were they gentle souls, capable of self-governance and high civilization? Or were they brute barbarians – *slaves by nature* – as Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda and the other sixteenth-century Spanish partisans of the Indian wars believed (Sepúlveda 1984)? The famous proceeding and debate at Valladolid between Bartolomé de Las Casas and Sepúlveda (1550–1) was fundamentally a racial debate. Las Casas' human rights claims were driven by a Christian sense of love for the neighbor against the death-dealing enslavement of the mines and fields of the early Spanish colonies. He began with the recognition that the Indians were indeed *neighbors* because they were *human beings*. On the other side were the partisans of the *encomienda*, who celebrated the Aristotelian notion that some people were born to be slaves, and others to be masters (Aristotle 1944).

The global division of labor that we have today was historically racialized. The saturated racisms that accompany today's debates over immigration in the United States and Europe took their roots – promulgating their first racist tropes about Indians and Africans – in the long sixteenth century of early modern Spain's imperial project. Particularly in today's migration-driven, transnational labor markets, regulated as much by labor demand as by immigration and border-control policies, we find migrants – often undocumented – routed into the most menial jobs, while also being subjected to vile expressions of nativism and racism. For theology to confront the deeper challenges of *mestizaje*, it must confront the historical role that racism has played in the construction of the subaltern labor classes that are intrinsic to capitalism. This means examining the class structure of the United States in terms of the ever-changing tropes of racial identity and racial privilege functioning in the larger ideological economy of capitalism. In the history of Latin American migrations to the United States, some groups were favored and others were not. Mexican migrants, for the most part, have come and gone across the US–México border as surplus laborers, enjoying fewer privileges than, say, Cuban

immigrants, who were welcomed by the United States with open arms after the revolution of 1959. It is not a coincidence that Cuban migrants – particularly those coming before the Mariel boatlift of 1980 – were whiter, were wealthier, and had stronger personal and family ties in North America. Many of those migrants had played personal roles opening the island to foreign investment – and sometimes to US military and diplomatic interventions. The question of class and national-origin differences in the migration streams and US Latino/a populations should completely undercut any idea that Latin@s can easily construct a *mestizo* future of universal inclusiveness and fraternity. Capitalism creates this stratification of differences – and the racialization of identities and citizenship is just one domain of the socialized difference that dissipates the dream of *mestizaje*. Latino/a theologians and scholars celebrate *mestizaje* at the risk of turning a blind eye to the effect their privileged social locations in the academy may have on the enunciation of an ideal like *mestizaje*. So the critique of *mestizaje* – and of racism in general – must be a critique of capitalism, particularly of the way capitalist economy creates racial and economic classes and their ideologies. Here US Latin@ theology could join ranks with work that Latin American liberation theology has long undertaken: a critical attack on capitalism as part of the historical project of human liberation, but this time with the added insight of meaningful critiques of racial formation and racism.

Notes

- 1 Among the innumerable possible examples is the story Chicano playwright Guillermo Gómez-Peña tells of staging his play *Ocnoceni* in Tijuana (Gómez-Peña 1996: 180): “In one scene a slide of the Virgin of Guadalupe was projected onto the white *hábito* of a gigantic nun (on stilts). In the piece, the nun suddenly broke into a sweaty tropical dance, and began doing a striptease. The night before the opening, during dress rehearsal, a group of conservative-looking women in their fifties sat quietly in the back row of the theater. We didn’t pay much attention to them. They stayed for an hour and left. The next morning, when my colleagues and I went back to the theater, we were told by the security guards what had happened. A group of militant *guadalupanos*, tipped off by the women who witnessed the rehearsal, had broken into the theater at night and trashed the set. They took a gallon of theater blood and painted religious slogans all over the floor and back wall. The message was clear: You simply don’t mess around with the Great Mother of México.”
- 2 This text is regularly called the *Nican Mopohua*, after a nearly identical text believed to have been written a century earlier, also in Nahuatl, by an Indian named Antonio Valeriano.
- 3 It is worth noting that critical literature on race in the Américas has perennially cast the Mesoamerican notion of *mestizaje* into comparison and dialogue with the more Caribbean concept of *transculturation* (which I define and discuss further in n. 11). See, for example, Godoy (1966); Rama (1982); Poey Baro (1994); Coronil (1995); De la Fuente (1998, 2001); Mignolo (2000); Arnedo-Gómez (2001, 2008); Santi (2002); Duno Gottberg (2003); Millington (2007); Medina (2009); and Benítez Rojo (2010), among many others..

- 4 See the later discussion of Manuel Vásquez' proposal for "rethinking *mestizaje*."
- 5 Elizondo has often collaborated – in conferences, publications, and other ventures – with leading figures in liberation theology, including José Oscar Beozzo, Leonardo Boff, and Gustavo Gutiérrez. Alongside writers like María Pilar Aquino, Orlando Espín, Otto Maduro, and Roberto Goizueta, Elizondo is one of the bridge figures connecting liberation theology with US Hispanic/Latino/a theology.
- 6 It is important to emphasize the *seeming* influence of Vasconcelos on Elizondo – who denies that he ever took Vasconcelos seriously as a source. As Rubén Rosario-Rodríguez points out (Rosario-Rodríguez 2008: 77), "none of his major works on *mestizaje* cite or discuss *La Raza Cósmica*, and when pressed by colleagues to discuss the influence of Vasconcelos on his own understanding of *mestizaje*, Elizondo affirms that his conceptualizations were nurtured and grew in the fertile ground of the popular religiosity of his childhood, with its focus on the Virgin of Guadalupe."
- 7 Two fascinating studies on race in Mexico's colonial period color my thinking: Lomnitz-Adler (1992) considers the formation of Mexican nationalism since the colonial period, including ideologies of the racial nation, while Israel (1975) studies the details of colonial racial formation.
- 8 By "naturalize" I mean that he has recourse to explanations that determine as natural processes, or biological laws, phenomena that might better be determined in terms of cultural, social, or historical theories, or theories of the political economy. The interpretive and ethical difference between the two approaches should not be overlooked: in the former scheme, human agency and responsibility are reduced or nullified altogether; in the latter, though limited by the transpersonal agency of social structures, human agency plays a larger explanatory role.
- 9 For example in *The Future Is Mestizo*, Elizondo speaks of his struggle to come to terms with white racism. At first, he chalked up his "so many Anglo racists" as "ignorant": "Much later on, I would discover that it was not just ignorance, but the Anglo drive to dominate, subjugate, and exploit. And even when some Anglos wanted to be of help, it was by helping the other becomes like themselves" (Elizondo 2000b: 21).
- 10 As to terminology it should be said that *Santería* is one name, somewhat pejorative, for a complex of West African-descended Cuban religions, mostly borne to Cuba along the Atlantic Passages of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. What North Americans call *Santería* is called either *Lukumí* (after the racializing pan-ethnic title given to those West Africans off the boat) or *Regla de Ocha* (the "rule of Ocha") by most of its practitioners. It is one of six significant Afro Cuban religious families, the lesser ones being the "reglas" of *Palo Monte*, *Abakuá*, *Vodú*, *Lyesa*, and *Arará*. See Barnet (2001).
- 11 *Transculturation* is Ortiz' term to describe the process of cultural transformation in situations of extreme migratory flux, such as Cuba's – with European, African, Asian, and indigenous populations and cultures blending together. Defining *transculturation* against *acculturation* – the more prevalent figure for cultural change in North American anthropology in the early part of the twentieth century – Ortiz argued that *acculturation* refers to a model in which new cultures are absorbed, and newly arrived peoples see their former cultures displaced and discarded. *Transculturation* describes a process of mutual, though perhaps uneven, transformation between older and newer groups in a larger national population. See Ortiz (2002).
- 12 *Mulato* is derived from the Spanish word for *mule* (*mula*), a sterile animal begotten by mating a horse with a donkey.

- 13 As already mentioned, however, Rosario-Rodríguez acknowledges Elizondo's insistence that the apparent habitation of Vasconcelos in his writing takes root more through Elizondo's everyday assimilation of Mexican popular religious culture than through any reading he did of Vasconcelos. (See n. 6.)
- 14 I cite in n. 3 a number of important contributions to scholarly debates over the respective values of *mestizaje* and transculturation.
- 15 I thank Mathew Frye Jacobson for his figuring of "whiteness of a different color," in his study on the racialization of different European immigrants in US history (Jacobson 1998).
- 16 In *Brown: The Last Discovery of America*, Richard Rodriguez offered one of the most literate postmodern expressions of *mestizaje* in a controversial, quasi-biographical text on coming to terms with mixed race Latin@ identity and the politics portended in the *browning* of America (Rodriguez 2002).
- 17 No one has made this point most insightfully than Manuel Mejido, in his "Propaedeutic to the Critique of the Study of U.S. Hispanic Religion: A Polemic Against Intellectual Assimilation" (Mejido 2002).
- 18 This synthetic insight is informed by several perspectives on world history, ideological formation, and the colonality of modernity. In France the *Annales* school of historical studies, headed by Fernand Braudel, led to more transnational and cross-disciplinary approaches to the study of the history of the Western political economy. Braudel's epochal studies on the Mediterranean (Braudel 1995) and on the long development of capitalism (Braudel 1973, 1992), gave way to the perspectives of dependency theory in Latin America, as well as Immanuel Wallerstein's theory of the *modern capitalist world-system*. Dependency theory was substantially a Latin American production, theorizing that transnational capitalist economic development and investment programs tend to foment deeper dependencies between first and third world countries than development of the underdeveloped societies. Wallerstein's work studies the long-historical construction of capitalism (Wallerstein 1979, 1991, 1995, 2011). Decolonial thought in Latin America has both adopted and criticized the world-system perspective: on the one hand it offers a compelling frame for understanding the history of capitalism and its cultures; on the other hand, Latin American theorists, such as Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano, insist that the world-system perspective underplayed the racialization of labor as an indispensable ingredient in the profitability of capitalist enterprises (Quijano 2000a, 2000b). Quijano's theory of the "coloniality of power" offers a sociologically and historically grounded account of the intrinsic role racial identities and racism play in historical capitalism. Finally, my understanding of capitalist ideology is informed by a stream of Marxist and late Marxist thinkers, but principally: György Lukács (Lukács 1971), Louis Althusser (Althusser 1972), Slavoj Žižek (Žižek 1994), and Judith Butler (1997a, 1997b). These last three thinkers open the horizon of understanding into the psychosomatic construction of ideology in the political subject. It is at this three-way intersection of reflections on capitalism, racism, and the psychosomatics of ideology that the most productive critique of racism in theology can be framed.

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CHAPTER 17

Theologizing Social and Economic Justice

Matilde Moros

If I were a student of theology, searching for how Latino/a theologians have dealt with issues of social and economic justice, I would immediately look to current affairs, issues of immigration, poverty, war, issues pertinent to racism, and all the other “isms.” After all, that is how we tend to understand social and economic injustices. However, even if these aspects of injustice are published about, it is a broader system or ethos of injustice that mars the Latino/a theological community in the United States. The fact of being Latino/a, a person of ambiguous “othered” ethnic status, is the largest way in which social and economic injustices affect the Latino/a community in the US. As such, the theologizing about this reality makes the context or location of theology for Latino/a as the place from which are made all other issues, how they relate to each other, how these realities are mirrored in scripture, and interpretations of justice. To introduce the theologizing of social and economic justice from a Latino/a perspective, this chapter will first review how identity is an overarching concern for social and economic justice in the US theological Latino/a community. The discussion will then turn to methods and research elements present in the analysis of social and economic justice of Latino/a theology, and finally explore the future of Latino/a culture-identity in the theologizing of social and economic justice. My contribution to this volume is from the perspective of a social ethicist and my approach is historical and ecumenical.

With regard to how Latino/a theologians understand who they are in relation to the world, there are many perspectives, but as Christians, Latino/as are not new to social and economic justice issues understood from the perspective of a remnant community as the driving force of their theology, which in many ways is relevant to the history of Christianity. The act of theologizing social and economic justice from a Latino/a

perspective is in itself a difficult one to describe, but situated in the particularities of history and the context of a broad Christian common reality is the starting point for this conversation. Because “Latino/a” itself is a category that acts as a term about identity, to do theology from an identity’s perspective is a journey that for those outside the community might seem difficult to trace. It may be that for those of us who are part of the Latino/a theological community, this journey is also difficult to track on a map of social justice issues. So much so, that the criterion by which we measure theologizing social and economic justice must start with the very question that drives all theology, namely: is this a journey that seeks God and dwells where God dwells? Furthermore, is the question of the Latino/a identity and its Christian theologizing about social and economic justice one that we can measure? If so, how and where would we start? Perhaps we begin with understanding that the Latino/a identity, in its multiplicity, is a marginalized and economically alienated identity. Although certainly there are Latino/a persons and communities that wield social power and wealth, the great majority of Latino/a peoples are considered a minority population in the larger US culture; not only a racial/ethnic social minority, but an economically deprived minority. How do we measure theologizing efforts by this community? It would seem that the only way to measure the theologizing of justice would be by how close God is to this community.

Introducing Latino/a Perspectives on Theologizing Social and Economic Justice

In the midst of social crisis, it was the famed archbishop of El Salvador who briefly explained how we discern and measure our Christian understanding of how our striving for social and economic justice is a Christian mandate. He answered the question: how do we know if God is near?

Hay un criterio para saber si Dios está cerca de nosotros o está lejos: ... todo aquél que se preocupa del hambriento, del desnudo, del pobre, del desaparecido, del torturado, del prisionero, de toda esa carne que sufre, tiene cerca a Dios. Clamarás al Señor y te escuchará.

La religión no consiste en mucho rezar, la religión consiste en esa garantía de tener a mi Dios cerca de mí; porque le hago el bien a mis hermanos. La garantía de mi oración no es el mucho decir palabras, la garantía de mi plegaria está muy fácil de conocer: ¿Cómo me porto con el pobre?, porque allí está Dios. (Romero 1978)

[There is one criterion to know if God is near us or far: every one that cares for the hungry, the naked, the poor, the disappeared, the tortured, the prisoner, all that flesh that suffers, has God near them. “You will call out to God, and God will hear your call.” Religion is not about how much praying one does. Religion is about that guarantee of having one’s God near to one because one does right by one’s brothers and sisters. The guarantee to our prayer is not so much a response to our saying lots of words, the guarantee to our plea is answered when we ask: How do I behave with the poor?, because that is where God dwells.]

God dwells in, among, in the midst of the poor, were words preached by Monsignor Oscar Romero of El Salvador, the martyred priest whose christology stemmed from the relationship with, and from the perspective of, the poor. He preached and explained that when Christians theologize about social and economic justice, they are where God is. Christian theologians speak of, or act on, issues of social justice or economic justice because this is what Jesus mandates, as clearly stated in the Gospels, and particularly spelled out in Mathew 5, where the beatitudes, and the statement about the fulfillment of the law become the clear definition of what Christians do, and how they are to be recognized. Hence a Christian theologian that writes about social and economic justice is simply witnessing to Jesus.

Who Are Latino/a Theologians to Speak of Social and Economic Justice?

More than answers about how Latino/a theologians witness about social and economic issues, perhaps what we share are questions about Latino/a theologians and the specificity of their identity. Some questions especially with regard to social justice are: how specifically linked to any one country or social context are Latino theologians? For example, if Latino/as are not from El Salvador, can they use this Christian and prophetic word from Romero to describe their own theology? How general and how specific can Latino/a theologians be with regard to social and economic justice if they do not share a common background? What do Christian theologians write about social justice or economic justice from the perspective of their particular racial ethnic community? Does it depend on which racial category one is in, or is it about how one is categorized if one is of mixed racial and ethnic heritage? What if the places where one becomes a theologian differ in how one is understood racially and ethnically? How are Latino/a identity issues regarding ethnic affiliation related to issues of race? The difference lies between how Latin Americans in the rest of the Americas understand race and ethnicity, on the one hand, and how Latino/a theologians are understood and/or understand themselves in the context of race and ethnicity as constructed in the US, on the other hand. This is perhaps the question that most drives Latino/a theologians in the US with regard to identity: what happens to a community's identity at the crossroads of racial constructs, cultures, and nationalities, when one individual or group becomes the crossroad itself? Theologically, where is Christ in all this? Is it as Oscar Romero preached, in or among the poor? If so, how does one understand the poor, in relation to race and class in the context of the US, when not everyone in this particularly minoritized Latino/a community is poor? Not all Latino/a men and women doing Christian theology do so in the name of their own poor family backgrounds. So that an ethnic category of a minoritized people, with all the diversity represented within that group, covers more than economics, but includes economics in what ails the community with regard to social justice. Becoming a community is the first step to specificity in the midst of greater differences.

What is universal about a Latino/a theology with regard to social and economic justice? Can other theologians understand what it is to speak and think theologically from a particular social place, an ethnic category, an ambiguous and complex mixture of cultures and histories? And can anyone doing theology imagine multiplicity as a space from which one acts, thinks, and writes? Is it possible to do theology from a critical analysis that is a collective theology? This is what Latino/a theologians have been doing: writing from a context, a locale, a space that brings together a wide variety of peoples, nationalities, histories, and perspectives into one community. Aside from the Roman Catholic/mainline Protestant Christian divide, the reality of Latino/a non-denominational and specifically Pentecostal Christians is largely growing not only in the US but in Latin America as well. So the conversation about Christianity itself becomes a social justice issue when understood from the perspective of one racial, ethnic, minoritized community.

What is specific about Latino/a theology with regard to social justice? Identity, beside the Christian identity, becomes a driving force behind the theological enterprise of Latino/as. Because the history of Latino/as in the US varies according to US expansionist history, US foreign policy, and US immigration policies, so does the perspective from which Latino/a social and economic justice issues are framed. Latino/a theologians speak of borders, margins, diaspora, and barrios. All of these are a way to speak of territories, but also about bodies, and about economies; they are as well a way to distance oneself from dominant theology. Instead of one culture, Latino/a theologians speak about *mestizaje*, which is biological mixing, but also cultural and religious, social and territorial mixing of peoples. *Mestizaje* encompasses much racial and other mixing, but a criticism of this construct is that it also erases blackness, the African diaspora aspect of being Latino/a, as the term is subjected to the hierarchy of accepted cultural interpretations of what it is to be Latino/a in the US and in Latin America. A text that correlates Latino/a ethnic and theological constructs in conversation with blackness in the US is Benjamin Valentin's co-authored text with Anthony Pinn, *The Ties that Bind: African American and Hispanic American Latino/a Theologies in Dialogue* (2001), a text that highlights cross-cultural conversation between Latino/a theologies and African American theologies that share the liberatory aspect of doing theology from the perspective of the disenfranchised, the poor, and of doing economic and social justice analysis. Part of the struggle with identity is the racial construct of Latino/as in contrast with dominant worldviews of whiteness from both the global South and the Northern hemisphere, so that the history of conquest, colonialism, in all of the Americas makes the identity issue for Latino/a theologians a transnational problem.

Transnational Christianity and Latino/a Theologizing about Social and Economic Justice

Original peoples of the Americas, and original peoples from Africa, in their multitude, became subsumed to the Spanish and Portuguese, the French, Dutch, the British, and creolized peoples. Cultures and languages that came from Europe, and Christianity

itself, became the dominant culture of the conquered and colonized American context. In this American new world context, how is it that what is now Latin America and the Caribbean were among the first territories in the Western hemisphere to become mestizo or mulatto territories? That is, spaces where mixed peoples inhabited. As such, the actual majorities in population numbers within the larger territorial areas of the Americas are mixed peoples, and with that comes a Christian journey that also incorporates a mixed heritage.

This dichotomy of being both the first Christians in the Americas and diaspora people in the US is best explained by Luis N. Rivera-Pagán in his texts *A Violent Evangelism: The Political and Religious Conquest of the Americas* (1992) and *Essays from the Diaspora* (2002). In the first text there is an exposition of how the Americas were first evangelized at the time of the Spanish conquest, making Latin Americans a mixed people of various backgrounds, and a Christian people by way of violence, and not only Christian, but predominantly a Catholic land in which varieties of theologies have emerged in a context in which migration has been part of the history of conquest. Diaspora is part of a transnational experience in which social justice is very much related to colonization and economic migration, and leads to theologizing social and economic justice. This experience of belonging both to traditional Spanish-speaking communities in Latin America and to multiple-language, multiple-immigrant-status-generation communities in the US makes Latino/a diaspora culture, in which the home of parents and grandparents remains home while the new reality of first, second, or further generations is also home.

When Latino/a theologians write about the Latino/a experience in the US, then, what they have in common is that original starting point of being Latin American first, and Latino/a in the US second. Even those born and raised in the US, who do not speak any other language than English, who have never visited their distant family in Latin America, are Latino/a because of the territorial and historical reference to Latin America. But how did these multiple generations of Latino/as become US Americans, and why write theology from that perspective as a social justice issue?

What is the history of Latino/as in the US? Latino/as first became US Americans when the US annexed large parts of what had been Mexico (1845) to its territories. In this sense, Latino/as speak of a border that crossed them. Not too much later in history, the US annexed colonial territories, in transference from Spain to the US (1898), in which Puerto Rico became officially a US colony. Later, through labor agreements, Dominicans were given permits to enter US territory as workers (Immigration Act of 1965). In the wake of what was perceived as a political danger to US hegemony in the Americas, Cubans were given special status as refugees in the late 1950s and onward. In the 1980s, Central Americans entered the US en masse, whether under amnesty or not. The US became either a part of a journey or a place to call home after multiple political moments in history. In the 1990s, over a hundred years after initial annexations of land and territories, the rest of Latin American and especially Colombian immigration increased. All along, borderlands received and became crossroads for large numbers of Mexicans and Central and South Americans who enter and leave daily, in

what is now a transnational voyage. So that over the last five generations there are families that have resided on what is now US territory since before there was a officially a country named the United States of America, and there are families that continue to migrate back and forth over geographic borders. There are as well families that reside in the US but whose members are a mixture of citizens from multiple lands, and whose children are born and/or raised in the US, and who know no other home. This history makes for a very great wealth of social and economic justice issues, but much of this identity voyage is economic in nature, and as such, doing theology from a particular place becomes a social justice statement.

In Whose Name?

Why is identity an issue of social and economic justice, then? So far in the description of this identity journey, I have disclosed a transnational process by which one becomes a Latino/a, I have used the name “Latino/a” without explanation, and I have claimed Latino/a Christian theologians as doing social justice and economic justice from a particular context, which is broader than many people might imagine. Some of this must be further studied, such as the historical ways in which various nationalities became Latino/as in the US, or how the Spanish language affects how we name ourselves, and finally how identity shapes how we see social and economic injustice. In the various chapters of *Teología en Conjunto: A Collaborative Hispanic Protestant Theology*, edited by José David Rodríguez and Loida I. Martell-Otero (1997), there are examples of how the words “Latino/a” and “Hispanic” are interchangeable to mean the people of Latin American heritage in the particular context of US living. The anthology is also an example of how people from various backgrounds in the Latino(a)/Hispanic community can come together for collaborative projects, including presenting a unified perspective of theological discernment, in this case how Protestant Latino(a) theologians might work theologically in the US context to hear each other’s voices and experiences.

How can a racial/ethnic category be a place from which to do Christian theology? Much like the broader history of Christianity, the history of Latino/a Christians becoming a people is a story of land, languages, translations, diasporas, empire, enslavement, exodus, multiple cultures, and multiple interpretations. This transnational process is ongoing. The language that affects how Latino/as name themselves is mostly Spanish, but it is also English and a multiplicity of combinations of these with each other and with other languages. Latino/as, however, for the purposes of this discussion, are the people generally known as inheritors of the Spanish culture, language, religion (s), and history of empire, which makes the naming of this community an issue of social justice as well. Hispanic, or Latin, Latino, Latina, or Latino(a): all of these names have the same referent, but different connotations. “Hispanic” is exclusive to those of Spanish heritage. “Latin” is an anglicized name for those of Latin-based linguistic heritage, which in the US has come to be known as Latin American heritage. “Latino” is the Spanish-language masculine version of “Latin.” “Latina” is the Spanish-language

feminine version of Latin. “Latino/a” is the gender-inclusive version of “Latin,” which we derive from territories that are Latin American, including Brazil, colonized by the Portuguese, and non-Spanish-speaking territories, originally under Spanish colonization. Suriname, Belize, parts of Nicaragua, Panama, and Colombia, have populations or parts of populations that speak English, but are Latin American. This debate of whether the community is Hispanic or Latino/a has not always been generated from within the community itself; it is in large part a response to US history, census categories, and broad ignorance of the complexity that makes this larger community one.

What about differences among this unity in the Latino/a community of Christian theologians? When one hears of Chicano studies, or Puerto Rican studies, or Caribbean studies, or Latin American studies, is that all about Latino/as? Yes, and no; it is about the particularities, the different areas from which Latino/as come. From the southwest of the US came one of the first theologians to publish specifically about Latino theology from the perspective of Mexican American, also known as “Chicano” (Mexican), Christian experiences. The text *Galilean Journey*, written by Virgil Elizondo and first published in 1983, has had revised and expanded editions and remains among the theological texts that reflect what it means to be Latino, mestizo, and a Christian from these communities in the United States. The idea that mestizaje is a form of mixing that happens with globalization is important, and if it is an experience that can shed light on the current globalization, it is important that this text be understood for its power.

Cultural Diversity and Ecumenical Unity

The power of this marginalized people is, first, that although this has been a marginalized community, socially, economically, and culturally, it now stands to become a population that is demographically representative of an ethnic minority that is a numerically growing population in the US. Second, in terms of power, it is important to understand the idea of the endurance or “aguante” of a people that have a “collective consciousness.” In Elizondo’s classic text (1983), the social justice issues are those of marginalization, discrimination, within the church and in the society. Elizondo’s telling of the journey of the Mexican American people is about the mestizaje of Mexican indigenous peoples and of the European, Spanish conquerors into the Mexican people. The second wave of mestizaje is about becoming Mexican American. Here mestizaje is about two communities that represent many cultures and then become a collective, and then another reality in which the collective becomes another people, the often-hyphenated Mexican-American.

Galilean Journey was the precursor to a number of other texts in which injustices, both social and economic, are explained theologically from the perspective of the Mexican American, Roman Catholic community. Next came a multiplicity of texts either authored by Elizondo, or edited with other prominent theologians, and filled with the writings of the next generation of Latino/a religious thinkers and theologians. Elizondo represents the contextualization of the social justice force behind the struggle to make mestizaje a theological term, and the mestizo/a a topic of theological discourse.

Texts that treat the identity of Mexican Americans as a social and economic issue to work with theologically include *Different Theologies, Common Responsibility: Babel or Pentecost?*, edited by Claude Geffré, Gustavo Gutiérrez, and Virgil Elizondo (1986); *The Future Is Mestizo: Life Where Culture Meets* (Elizondo 1988); and *Latino Religions and Civic Activism in the United States*, edited by Gastón Espinosa, Virgilio Elizondo, and Jesse Miranda (2005), a text with essays written by a gathering of intellectuals of a second generation of Latino/a scholars writing about religion in the context of social justice. Specifically about the social movements that are based on faith-based activism during the last one hundred and fifty or so years are *San Fernando Cathedral: Soul of the City*, by Virgilio P. Elizondo and Timothy M. Matovina (1998) and *The Treasure of Guadalupe*, edited by Virgilio Elizondo, Allan Figueroa Deck, and Timothy Matovina (2006).

In the struggle to make the case of another community, Justo Gonzales, a Cuban American Methodist theologian, also began to publish texts in his area of history of Christianity. In his attempt to write about history, he became a prominent and often-quoted writer, and his publications have become standard texts for seminaries across the US. His work maintained a distinct concern for Hispanic/Latino/theological communities, with strategic advocacy for the organizing of the Hispanic Theological Initiative and the Hispanic Summer Program, both institutions that assist Latino/a theological students to move through their seminary and doctoral programs in supportive environments. This work developed into his *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (1990), a classic theology text, again claiming identity for Latino(as) as a social justice issue. This work has a long foreword written by Virgilio Elizondo, in which he stressed how much of a US Latino Justo Gonzalez, is, and outlined a journey through which differences are made into assets. The ecumenical engagement between a Roman Catholic and a Protestant religious, the differences between a Mexican American and a Cuban American, the various ways in which each of these elders among Latino scholars differ, are overcome by the social justice issue of identity in the US. It is the Latino identity, the Hispanic experience, the Christian experience of those in the community who understand that to be Christian is not to work from a perspective of the center, rather that Christian theology is at its best a perspective of the margins, a story of those who are excluded by all but God.

Gonzalez' publications vary in historical emphasis, from the Cuban to the Caribbean, to the Methodist particularities, to the Latin American and larger Christian histories. He understands that Latino/a theologies and histories differ within regions of the US, and that nationally, there are worship materials, hymnals, textbooks, and spaces that all need to be incorporated into the larger culture, and that both English and Spanish are languages of the community. His texts include, among many, *The Development of Christianity in the Latin Caribbean* (1969), *Historia del Pensamiento Cristiano/A History of Christian Thought* (1970–5), *The Story of Christianity* (1984), and *Santa Biblia: The Bible through Hispanic Eyes* (1996). These two scholars, Elizondo and Gonzalez, whose work has been prolific, who have worked with various other scholars across generational divides, and whose ecumenical dialogue is recorded in the preface to *Mañana* (Gonzalez 1990), were among of the first to be published in English and whose work helped shape the Latino(a)–Hispanic theological community's emphasis on identity as a social justice

issue. To be Latino(a) is to be poor in many ways, since the racial/ethnic category is historically one in which the result of conquest and colonization of the Americas created a divide, of which the have-nots included Latino/as.

Another scholar whose work in biblical scholarship created a deep respect for scholarship done by Latino/as is Fernando Segovia. His work also created a consciousness about how theology and biblical scholarship from an ethnic perspective could grow into the work of so many in younger generations, for whom margins, borders, and the diaspora are where God is, and as Oscar Romero discussed in his homily it is because these spaces are not where the dominant and privileged are centered, rather it is where the poor are, and where God dwells.

Scripture as Guide for Doing Justice in Social Conflict

Segovia's work on biblical analysis from the perspective of a postcolonial biblical interpretation situates Latino(a) theology and social and economic justice in the realm of the similarities between a twenty-first-century community and the early church. This analysis also places Latino(a) communities not only within the space of racial-ethnic minoritized communities in the US, but in the context of the transnational reality that was present in scripture and is present today within the analysis of conquest, colonization, and empire. Starting in the late 1990s with a reading of the fourth gospel (1996, 1998), Segovia then co-edited the only text of his that carries a title relating Latino/a theology to his work: *Hispanic/Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise*, edited by Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Segovia (1996). Since those works published in the 1990s, his texts have included anthologies with Bible scholars from around the world and from other minoritized racial ethnic communities, as well as a tribute to feminist biblical scholar Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza. This great variety of perspectives gives Segovia's work a particular lens of understanding identity as a social and economic issue for theology, starting with how one reads and works on the interpretation of the biblical text. His works include *They Were All Together in One Place: Toward Minority Biblical Criticism*, edited by Randall C. Bailey, Tat-siong Benny Liew, and Segovia (2009); *The Future of the Biblical Past: Envisioning Biblical Studies on a Global Key*, edited by Roland Boer and Segovia (2012); *New Paradigms for Bible Study: The Bible in the Third Millennium*, edited by Robert M. Fowler, Edith Blumhofer, and Segovia (2004); *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections*, edited by Stephen D. Moore and Segovia (2005); and *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings*, edited by Segovia and R. S. Sugirtharajah (2007), with which Segovia puts Latino/a biblical theology on the international map, and from a perspective that takes into account issues of the global identity of the disenfranchised.

Not only did Ada María Isasi-Díaz write and edit works with others, but her own texts created a new category for Latina women to identify with or be identified by. These were her groundbreaking *Mujerista Theology* (1996) and her *En la Lucha/In the Struggle: A Hispanic Women's Liberation Theology* (1993). Both texts are used in seminars throughout the US and are known for their ethnographic reporting on the role of religion

in the struggle of Latina women to make a new life there. Arguing that both the church, in this case the Roman Catholic Church, and the socioeconomic status of many Latina immigrant women are causes for struggle and of the specificity of Latina identity provides a platform from which a theology has emerged. *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/o Theology and Philosophy*, edited by Isasi-Díaz and Eduardo Mendieta (2012), explores local ways of knowing that further define theological work that supports social and economic justice from the varied ways in which Latino(a) identity is shaped, as well as how decolonization is one perspective through which conquest and colonization, not just in biblical times but in the context of Latino/a Christianity, become a way to seek justice.

Like Isasi-Díaz, Elizabeth Conde-Frazier has written from the perspective of Latina women immigrants and their families in the US. Her focus is on the experience of the children, the second generation that is marginalized, yet knows only the immigrant predecessors, not necessarily the context of Latin America. *Listen to the Children: Conversations With Immigrant Families* (2011) specifically enters the world of the globalized Latino(a) family in which multiple generations belong to multiple understandings of how one is Latino/a. The injustices faced by Latino/a children are theologized by Conde-Frazier, but Isasi-Díaz theologizes from the perspective of feminist liberation theology. This calls into question the role that Latin American liberation theology has had in the theologizing of social and economic justice issues by Latino(a) theologians in the US. Migration and immigration situate Latino/a theologizing about social and economic justice in the realm of globalization, furthering its transnational and biblical frames.

Social Analysis and Justice

Otto Maduro's classic text *Religion and the Social Process* (1982), which is widely used in seminaries in Latin America, is also used in the US and is a foundational text in relating the sociology of religion to the theologizing of social and economic justice issues. *The Future of Liberation Theology: Essays in Honor of Gustavo Gutiérrez*, edited by Marc H. Ellis and Maduro (1989), further placed Latin American liberation theology, specifically Gutierrez' writings, at the forefront of Latino(a) theological endeavor and moreover created a broader platform, based on social analysis, from which to understand the poor and the theologizing of social and economic justice in this context.

Beyond the inclusion of Latin American liberation theology and the reaching out ecumenically between Roman Catholic and Protestants, beyond feminist liberation theology and a theology on behalf of the future of Latino(a) peoples, the issues of justice with regard to social oppression and theology also include in this Christian theologizing those previously excluded traditions which have been part of the Christian experience for people of Latin American heritage. Popular religions have been seen, in terms of both religious and theological traditions, as conquered or fringe aspects of a culture that remains mixed or mestizo and mulatto, not only in racial ethnic identity but in the mixing of religious identities as well. Before Orlando O. Espín edited *Building Bridges, Doing Justice: Constructing a Latino/a Ecumenical Theology* (2009), he and Gary Macy edited *Futuring*

Our Past: Explorations in the Theology of Tradition (2006), Espín wrote *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism* (1997), and, with Miguel Diaz, edited *From the Heart of our People: Latino/a Explorations in Catholic Systematic Theology* (1999). All of these aspects of Espín's research relate to social and economic justice in that the largest denominations of the Christian church in Latin America and for Latino(a)s in the US are in some way affiliated to Roman Catholicism; the research into and publication of popular religiosity, systematic theology, and ecumenical relations from the perspective of a Latino who is first generation is valuable in the quest for social and economic justice as these issues are implicit and explicit in his work. In many ways these publications, and especially his text *Grace and Humanness: Theological Reflections because of Culture* (2007), are inter-religious – as in popular religiosity – conversations in an attempt to speak theologically about a long-oppressed aspect of Latino(a) culture and identity: the various ways in which people of Latin American heritage worship and relate to the religious.

Conclusion: Identity-Culture and Social and Economic Justice

In her text *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990), philosopher and theorist Iris Marion Young proposed a definition of culture and its impact on social movements that might be helpful in understanding how it is that Latino/a theologians begin to approach social and economic justice issues in the US. She stated:

Culture is a broad category, and I do not intend to give it a precise definition here. Culture includes that background and medium of action, the unconscious habits, desires, meanings, gestures and so on that people grow into and bring to their interactions. Usually culture is just there, a set of traditions and meanings that change, but seldom as the result of conscious reflection and decision. (Young 1990: 86)

Doing Christian theology from a social and economic perspective for Latino/a theologians has been a journey of biblical, historical, ethical, pastoral, ecumenical, gendered, and generational discernment. The wide spectrum of issues mentioned throughout this chapter has been impacting Latino/a identity as the bigger category from which social and economic issues are analyzed. However, the future wave of theologizing about social and economic justice from a Latino/a perspective must include interdisciplinary work; a focus on immigration and children; a consideration of how, in great part, gender and sexuality have been kept out of the conversation until very recently; and the waves of problems that rise from the large urban sprawl of Latino/a peoples in all the urban centers of the US, detention centers, prisons, schools, social agencies, streets, and most workplaces in the country.

The very present reality of immigration status and lack of adequate and appropriate policies that would allow for the regularization of entire families, generations, and groups of peoples must become the next focus of the identity-based theology for Latino/a theologians. When multiple generations of Latino/as continue to be treated as recent

immigrants, the complications of identity become even more problematic, where for some it is a forced category from outside the community, while for others it is a platform from which we do analysis and critique a system that does not allow for differentiation. Where for some it is a place where a broader identity draws on a common conquest based on a common colonial history, for others it is an amalgamation that problematizes individual and particular difficulties that occur when assimilation to US culture is not the ideal result of immigration, annexation, or continued colonial status. The systematization of Latino/a Catholic, Protestant, or any other form of theology is problematic when the story is not complete in any one phase of waves of immigration. Other communities, from other parts of the world, have a clearer history of waves of immigration to the US, voluntary or involuntary, and the history itself of when their families or cultural groups immigrated or migrated or were brought to the Americas clarifies the history of who these communities are within US culture. Latino(a) communities instead continue to have a flow of new people arrive on US soil daily, while also laying claim to a historic relation to original peoples from the Americas, and to national identities that vary widely from region to region, from country to country, and across histories within the very complex American nations.

With this in mind, the new theologies of liberation which include decolonial lenses and postcolonial angles may be a way to explain how it is that previously colonized peoples in the Americas now are the largest wave of new workers and neighbors in the US. In brief, it is an economic history and a social history of the Latino/a identity that should drive Latino/a theology with regard to these aspects. A christology from a Latino/a perspective, for example, is a christology that begins with the perspective of the poor, marginalized, and socially unaccepted Christian. An example would be Luis Pedraja's *Jesus Is My Uncle: Christology From a Hispanic Perspective* (1999), in which the familiarity of Jesus as a marginal character in society yet a central savior in salvation history is explored within the context of social and economic alienation that Latino/a people experience in the US. As I began this chapter, I placed at the forefront of my writing that I write as a social ethicist, and within the realm of theological analysis, the ethics of social and economic justice for Latino/a have been shaped by many theologians and a few ethicists. One such ethicist is Miguel De La Torre, whose text *Doing Christian Ethics from the Margins* (2004) set going the conversation about marginality and center around the discourse of race and ethnicity. In his first chapter, De La Torre explains that Christian moral values vary greatly from one another, and that in the name of moral uprightness there are racial groups who can say that they uphold Christian values while at the same time doing the opposite. His first chapter gives the affirmation that we have to choose whose Christian paradigms we affirm and hold on to. The multiplicity of Latino/a Christians alone is nuanced with difference, but so are other groups and paradigms. Whose paradigms do Latino/a theologians uphold if Oscar Romero's question about dwelling in the place where God dwells is current? The place of the orphan, the widow, the imprisoned, the hungry, those who mourn and those who are persecuted can be filled by people of any racial/ethnic background. When en masse the largest group of immigrants is oppressed and

marginalized further, the claim that the poor in this country are Latino/a immigrants can be affirmed.

Since the early 2000s, the plight of immigrants, from front page news to lucrative detention centers and prisons, has shaped our worldview. Latino/a theologians have mostly written from either a Catholic, Protestant, or Evangelical perspective about how churches are dealing with immigration injustices. Yet a comprehensive, ecumenical, and critical theology of immigration, with the complexity of the history and culture of Latino/as in the United States, is yet to come. Essays that focus on immigration state what the hope of recent immigration is for Latino/a communities, while theologies of social and economic justice and the future of Christianity in the US include statements about the value of immigration.

In emergent immigrant communities, where so many members of the population foreground memories of recent arrivals in their personal histories, immigration stories become, like language, a common characteristic. Immigration creates a new folklore, one of escape and readjustment, and, in the case of immigration theology, eventual renewal. These are the experiences that most recently arrived Latinos have in common. (Armijo 2000)

To a student of ethics, the possibility of “eventual renewal” implies a turning around from behavior that excludes and dehumanizes recent immigrants, toward one in which the inclusion and full humanization of the stranger, the immigrant, are a possibility and a reality. It is estimated that there are over fifty million Latino/as living in the US (Brown 2014), and in this nation it is a reality that many of the recent immigrants are unwelcome, and that they are not allowed to process proper documentation and permission to be in the country is another reality. Latino/a theologians must work on issues of economic and social justice for those whose immigration history is most recent, and continue to write about religious, national, cultural, linguistic, and other differences. The orientation of categories relating to race and identity may become also a place of “eventual renewal,” with the challenge of theological discourse emerging from new and upcoming Latino/a theologians in the US, for whom a continued value of doing work in “conjunto” or collaboratively is now developing into new social and economic justice topics for the larger theological community, and in a diaspora context for people both in the US and in Latin America. Latino/a social and economic justice is itself a location for theology to encounter God, because the poor are there, and because the disenfranchised are there.

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CHAPTER 18

Queer Theory and Latina/o Theologizing

Robyn Henderson-Espinoza

This chapter situates existing Latin@ theology with the emergence of queer¹ theory, and focuses primarily on the intersections of emerging queer theories of color and Latin@ theologies. Both Latin@ theology and queer theory help reimagine the borders of thinking, creating paradigms that leave traces of intellectual transgression that, I argue, are seen in the intellectual work of *retorcer* (twisting/turning) and *volverse* (a becoming process). These transgressive paths create critical and creative openings for new theological discourses to emerge as radically different from the dominant strands of normative theologies (and ideologies), and one such opening is a queer opening whereby a robust critique of the standpoint of difference and destabilized identities can intersect with new contours of Latin@ theologizing. This queer opening destabilizes and decentralizes the cohesive togetherness of Latin@ theology that has perpetuated the systematizing of the discourse, focusing on, instead, a discourse of identity, resistance, politics, and futurity through a queer lens, but does so by critiquing stable identities and standpoints that erase complex differences and assume a cohesion in discourse.

Because social location is important to Latin@ theology and the use of the “I” important to some queer theorists, this chapter will focus on the constructive moves that diverse queer theories of color can make in existing Latin@ theologies when theorizing standpoints of difference and identities; furthermore, this chapter will suggest a queerly normative future horizon that seeks to utilize existing Latin@ theologies in queer ways, thereby establishing a futurity of queer Latin@ theologizing.² This suggestion is an attempt to highlight the very real reality of in/betweenness that is central to Latin@s’ identities and that oftentimes has been used to stabilize Latin@s in a reality of struggle, instead of allowing in/betweenness to be the effort of what propels their unstable identity emerging as a queer identity. What this chapter also does is locate queerness as

a formative site of theologizing for Latin@s beyond the theistic paradigm. This chapter does not seek to construct a confessional statement about Latin@s or queerness, but rather use these analytic frameworks to help displace the *queer omission* that has persisted in Latin@ theology. Indeed, there is a *queer omission* in Latin@ theology (Nickoloff 2003), and it is my hope that this chapter helps develop new contours for queer thinking which burrows at the intersection of queer theory and Latin@ theologizing.

Absent from Latin@ theologies is a robust framework of sex, gender, sexuality, and the ways these material and discursive realities affect Latin@ bodies. There are “progressive” contributions to Latin@ theology, but even these do not take up the marginalization and oppression of the sexualized minority, or queer persons relative to race and class. What often characterize Latin@ theology as a progressive contribution to the field of theology and ethics are the contributions made by Latina feminists, and one can trace this as far back as colonial times in Mexico, beginning with Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. The traces of progressive Latin@ theology are best seen in feminist articulations of the cultural production of these discourses, but these traces are not transgressive as I will suggest that the intersection of queer theory and Latin@ theology is.³ Progressive theologies, seen in Latina feminist theology or *mujerista* theologies, elucidate a heteronormative theology that very well eclipses the radical differences that emerge out of the lives of queer persons. I will not suggest a homonormative queer Latin@ theology but rather lift up the intersections of these two theoretical frameworks and suggest a meaningful outcome seen in a (not yet) queer future.

Situated as a twin-root system whose branches are on the one hand the “*mujerisma*” and “*mujerista*” of Ada María Isasi-Díaz and on the other hand the post-Medellín critique stemming from María Pilar Aquino,⁴ this created a framework of “progressive” Latin@ feminist theological contributions. These contributions remain dependent upon traditional expressions of Christian theology and an ecclesial center and, in fact, these feminist contributions might be called “ecclesial feminism.”⁵

These two “branches” of Latina feminist theology carry second-generation Latin@ feminist scholars and rely on traditional feminist standpoint theory where the politics of location and marginalization create the conditions for understanding the production of knowledge. The emerging third-generation scholars who span the queer spectrum are utilizing robust and complicated theories (that also span epistemological and methodological commitments), which provide a constellation of differences relative to sex, gender, and sexuality, bodies, identity, and politics. This generation does not depend upon traditional theological expressions, or normative doctrines of the Church; they, in fact, displace and disrupt the doctrines in their queer production of theology.

What this chapter attempts to accomplish is to clarify a queer Latin@ theology, or at least begin the conversation of what a queer Latin@ theology might become. This requires the act of carefully tracing where Latin@s have been relative to the span of Latin@ theology and the intersection with queerness and the theories that elucidate queerness.⁶ I also recognize that there is no singular queer Latin@ theology, but rather a plurality of queer Latin@ theologies which are in process as I write this piece. As I

have tried to be in this chapter and as I know other queer Latin@ theologies are, they are all attentive to the particularities of varying Latin@s and queer persons. I see these critical openings in two parts: what has been accomplished in terms of Latin@ theology and queerness, and an offer of a distinctive queer feature seeking to bridge the multiple generations of Latin@ theological scholarship having various and diverse religious commitments with diverse queer theories. While this chapter recognizes that there are both “out” and “closeted” LGBT Latin@ theologians and queer Latin@ theologians writing and doing Latin@ theology, this is the first treatment of bridging together Latin@ theology with diverse queer theories that will clarify a queer Latin@ theology.⁷

This chapter situates existing Latin@ theology, introduces queer theory as a socio-analytic medium, then seeks to combine existing themes in Latin@ theology with diverse queer theories as a way to “do” Latin@ theology like a queer. I utilize four main themes in this chapter – narrative, agency, politics, and futurity – to chart the intersection of Latin@ theologizing with diverse queer theories, with the hope of transgressing normative boundaries in the creation of a Latin@ queer theology.

Latin@ Theologizing

Latin@⁸ theologies are characterized by three important features: *cotidiano*,⁹ *conjunto*,¹⁰ and movement. Latin@s are people whose lived experience is often characterized as being “on the margins,” excluded from dominant sectors of society. This lived experience is what makes Latin@ theologies so rich. They are theologies that are born out of lived experience and exclusion mediated by ongoing plurality and particularities. Existing Latin@ theologies have capitalized on theology *en conjunto*, and several Latin@ theologians write about *lo cotidiano*. A 2014 publication by Orlando Espín reminds his readers that while his book was published, it is an ongoing conversation and a theology *en conjunto*. Likewise, Latina feminists have spent a lot of time and energy detailing the lived experience of women, who are perpetually on the margins of the margins. This reality is a staple of Latin@ theology, and one of the three prongs that enlivens it.

Second, a theology *en conjunto* is something that is widely discussed among Latin@ theologians. Collaborating or creating theology in community is a central feature of a Latin@ production of theology, noting the importance of the ongoing feature of conversation as theology in the making. In fact, there are several books that have been either co-authored by Latin@s or anthologies crafted by Latin@s as a way to model a theology *en conjunto*. Likewise, at conferences and other professional gatherings, Latin@s gather in community as a way to continue the conversation and produce theology. Not all theology that Latin@s produce is crystallized in bound books and sold by big stores or online retailers. And not all theology that is written by Latin@s is a theology *en conjunto*! Latin@s have a larger vision for their theology, which conforms to a theology that is born from stories and personal narratives, from lived experiences, and strategically resides in community. Local activists and theologians, priests, and pastors develop relationships to create a more robust theology *en conjunto*. This is an important

feature of Latin@ theologizing, which the academic industrial complex¹¹ often undermines where what counts as theology is printed scholarship by tenured professors. Latin@ theology *en conjunto* is a type of scholarship and theologizing that focuses on communities, and developing and maintaining relationships within churches and local communities. The type of theology that jettisons the academic industrial complex and invites whole communities to flourish is a theology *en conjunto*. This theology may not be readily published by large academic houses, but it is alive and well in Latin@ communities. In departing from the academic industrial complex, Latin@ theologizing capitalizes on the stories told by all persons that are rich with theological features, and helps further the liberation of all Latin@s.

Third, Latin@s are known for their borderland movements and their persistent living (*en la lucha*). Movement of Latin@s is characterized by both their physical movement between nations and states and their political allegiances and religious commitments that often shift, as a result of their (sometimes) forced migrations. Movement of Latin@s “shows” up in Latin@ theology and is characterized by the ways in which these theologies “shift lenses.”

These three elements have been taken up in Latin@ theology by both Latina feminists and *mujerista* theologies and those written by both Latinos and Latinas. Latin@ theology has suffered under an intense systematization as Latin@ theologians seek to constructively create a theology by and for Latin@s. While culture has been addressed, it has only been addressed marginally, and significant features of culture have not been addressed, namely sex, sexuality, desire, and gender. This is where bridging together Latin@ theologies with queer theories creates new intersections of theological thought.

Queer Theory

Queer theory has its origins, traditionally, with two Euro American theorists and one European – Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith Butler, and Michel Foucault – and these three thinkers dominate existing strands of queer theory. There are certainly non-canonical theorists, like noted theorist-scholar-activist Gloria Anzaldúa, but the canon that is most often recognized and noted as having begun the theory of queerness is the work of these three that I have mentioned, though I do recognize this is a contested genealogy.

Queer theory can be defined as a field of poststructuralist critical theory emerging in the early 1990s out of the fields of queer studies and women’s studies. Queer theory includes both queer readings of texts and the theorization of “queerness” itself. By this, I mean that queer initially took up the challenge to do a different, contested, strange reading of texts, noting the non-normative and counter-normative twists and turns. Today, queer theory is heavily influenced by the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith Butler, Lauren Berlant, Leo Bersani, and Lee Edelman, among others. Queer theory builds both upon new contours of feminist challenges to the idea that gender is part of the essential self and upon gay/lesbian studies’ close examination of the socially constructed nature of sexual acts and identities. Whereas gay/lesbian

studies focused its inquiries into natural and unnatural behavior with respect to homosexual behavior, queer theory expands its focus to encompass any kind of sexual activity or identity that falls into normative and deviant categories, and privileges new formations of resistance, assimilation, identity, and subjectivity by bridging together critical social theories and psychoanalytic theories. Queer theory still maintains an allegiance to identity as a formidable project within the social sciences, and gay/lesbian subjects are still considered part of queer theory's scope. Queer theory is more than that, too.

Queer has been associated most prominently with bisexual, lesbian, and gay subjects, but its analytic framework also includes such topics as cross-dressing, intersexuality (see Susannah Cornwall's work), gender ambiguity, and gender-corrective surgery (see transgender studies and the work of Susan Stryker). Queer theory's attempted debunking of stable (and correlated) sexes, genders, and sexualities develops out of the specifically lesbian and gay reworking of the poststructuralist figuring of identity as a constellation of multiple and unstable positions. Queer theory examines the constitutive discourses of homosexuality developed in the twentieth century in order to place "queer" in its historical context, and surveys contemporary arguments both for and against this latest terminology.

Annamarie Jagose wrote *Queer Theory: An Introduction* in 1997. "Queer" used to be slang for "homosexual" and, worse, used for homophobic abuse. Recently, this term has been used both as an umbrella term for cultural sexual identifications (LGBT) and as a model for more traditional lesbian and gay studies. According to Jagose, queer focuses on mismatches between sex, gender and desire. For most, queer has prominently been associated with those who identify as lesbian and gay. Queer also spans the gamut when thinking about identity as resistance and refusing to assimilate into normalized identity categories. For example, a "heterosexual" or "straight" person might have desires that are not "heterosexual" and thus participate in communities that allow for their desires to flourish in creative ways. Likewise, a "queer" person might have non-queer desires and in turn participate in communities that create space for their desires to flourish. Attempting to stabilize queer is a task that should be avoided. The spectrum of queerness allows for queer to be as fluid as it can be and refuse any sort of essence in identity.

Queer theory was originally associated with the radical gay politics of ActUp, Outrage, and other groups which embraced "queer" as an identity label that pointed to a separatist, non-assimilationist politics. As it has come to be understood in cultural theory, however, queer theory challenges either/or, essentialist notions of homosexuality and heterosexuality within the mainstream discourse, and instead posits an understanding of sexuality that emphasizes moving beyond the binaries, shifting boundaries, ambiguities, ambivalences, and cultural constructions that change depending on historical and cultural context. "To queer" is to render "normal" sexuality as strange and unsettled or destabilized, to challenge heterosexuality as a naturalized social-sexual norm and promote the notion of "non-straightness," challenging the hegemony of "straight" ideology. This emphasis on non-straightness lends queer theory its non-assimilationist, anti-essentialist cast, for when one considers the realms of fantasy, the unconscious, repression, and denial, much that is ostensibly considered "heterosexual"

easily falls within the realm of queer. The influential work of Judith Butler, particularly *Gender Trouble* (1990), with its now broadly overused concept of “performative” sexuality and gender identity, seeks to reject stable categories altogether. While thoroughly disruptive of mainstream “truth regimes” of sexuality, it also challenges standard gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, and transgender politics. In Butler’s conception, these terms are rendered meaningless when stripped of the institutional means that support them. Alexander Doty’s notion of “queer reception,” in *Making Things Perfectly Queer* (1993), is another way in which standard categories are challenged. Doty separates “reception” from “identity” and stresses the way a spectator may derive “queer pleasure” by deviating from standard categories in viewing film and television. Thus straight-identified women spectators might experience “queer pleasure” at the sexual tension generated between Geena Davis and Susan Sarandon in *Thelma and Louise*; straight-identified men might enjoy the exaggerated homoeroticism of Stallone’s *Rambo*.¹²

As queer theory became a discipline in the 1990s, it has since flourished in Performance studies departments, departments of English, gender studies, and some strands of philosophy. As queer theory has become a formative discourse within the academy critiquing such issues as sex, gender, and desire, new themes have emerged: queer futurity, the anti-social thesis, radicalization and racialization with queerness, among others, such as queerness and the postcolony. As queer theory has flourished, there have been new in(ter)ventions in the discourse to interrogate sexuality and desire from a racialized standpoint, along with new epistemological, ontological, and ethical strands that use a wide variety of critical social theories and psychoanalytic theory, new formations of subjectivity, and race as a central marker in the development of racialized queer theory. Authors include José Esteban Muñoz, Sandra K. Soto, Emma Perez, and Antonio Viego, among others. What a racialized queer theory initiates is the critical opening of reading Latin@ “like a queer.”¹³

Reading Latin@ “like a queer” means that one must consider the racialized standpoint of bodies and their racialized social context as important for the development of sex, gender, desire, and sexuality. These standpoints enliven the ethical, ontological, and epistemological realities that drive current trends in queer theory. I utilize this tripartite way of thinking to consider a Latin@ queer theory.

The Voices of Our Ancestors and Our Neighbors: Narrative as Queerly Speaking

Latin@ theology, including Latina feminist theology and *mujerista* theology, has focused on narrative, lived experience, struggle, and the ways that personal and collective narratives shape existing theologies that emerge as a result of deep struggle, be that cultural, nationalistic, or religious. Narrative is a central organizing feature of Latin@ theology and the theologizing that stems from the theological conversations proliferating in Latin@ communities. Because of Latin@s’ commitment to community, this is

often the first place that theology emerges – in conversation, and in narrative style; but the Americanization and corporatization of Latin@ theology and the publishing industrial complex has shaped this conversational-style theology into a systematized genre of theology. In contrast to the ways that the white dominant community create some of their theology, feminist theology aside, story is a central component of Latin@ theologizing, and I argue that active listening to the voices of our ancestors and our neighbors can produce a narrative that functions as queerly speaking. Narrative is also a key feature of queer theory, though narrative for queer theory exists as a twisting and turning, making strange, enterprise.¹⁴

Given that narrative is a central organizing feature of Latin@ theology, I wish to explore a short story written by Tejana-Patlache feminist Gloria Anzaldúa, first to show the pioneering work of US Latin@s, and second to unmask foundational queer identities and theories. Reading narrative like a queer is one “leg” in developing a Latin@ queer theory and a queer Latin@ theology. The stories that I highlight here are older short stories that pioneered a racialized queer theory and theory of identity, both of which are important for this exercise.

Gloria Anzaldúa uses religion and myth in much of her writing, though she was never called a theologian. Anzaldúa’s work is spirit-inflected and bears significant fruit for the Chicana feminist movement and those who “do” US Latin@ theology. If, for example, one were to consider her short story “El Paisano is a Bird of Good Omen” (Keating 2009: 51ff.), one could draw out the theological, ethical, and queer themes of this story and essentially perform or “do” a queer reading of it. When one does this, one is “doing” Latin@ queer theology, and this doing of a Latin@ queer theology is in many ways strange and at the margins of the margins of what is considered “traditional” theology. Utilizing Anzaldúa as a queer theologian helps fortify emerging queer standpoints in the work of Latin@ theology and ethics.

“El Paisano is a Bird of Good Omen” is a story is about two young people who are positioned to be married. Neither of them wants to marry the other, but potentially they want to run away together. They are queer – their desires are not for each other but for something greater and something not yet materialized in the story. The story takes the reader through the rituals of the day and night prior to the wedding and tells the story of sex, gender, and desire from the lens of a queer author. Relationality becomes a queer element in this story, and the ways race, class, gender, and sexuality inform this story are significant. Reading this story as a US Latin@ theologian, I am aware that this narrative does not speak theologically, but the task of the queer theorist is to find the twists and turns in the text/narrative and see the queer openings in the formation of identity, rooted in struggle, and the lived experiences of both of the main characters.

Written by queer Chicana feminist theorist Anzaldúa, this story showcases the ways that theology, ethics, and social theory emerge in queer texts. Rituals become complicated by notions of desire, theologies are reinterpreted by those who are marginalized and outcast, and the story turns into a queer, strange text that centers on counter-normative ideas concerning relationality and desire. These are theological themes that are often not taken up in traditional Latin@ theology – themes that shape the queer

experience of engaging in theology and ethics. I begin with this short story because it offers readers a chance to experience a narrative that calls for all bodies to speak queerly – narratives that emerge from struggle and lived experience, an important trope in Latin@ theologies. Speaking queerly is the act of articulating desire that stems from the materiality of the body that is not banished by theologies but rather embraced by them and further developed (Marcella Althaus-Reid's work, for example, does this). This story traces desire throughout the entire narrative, and does so by highlighting several different rituals where desire is a key component of the narrative. Noticing this, theology, ethics, and social theory take on a new shape and form whereby they are queered (made strange) and complicated by the voices that articulate these non-normative, even counter-normative desires.

A second story that elucidates a queer narrative is “La Prieta,” also written by Gloria Anzaldúa (Keating 2009: 39ff.). Here, the story brings together multiple generations of Latin@s and an identity that is stranger than the Mexican borderland people situated within a singular local community. I reference this story because it is a narrative that helps us recognize the stranger within us, the one who is radically different, defying all norms that push us outside of the ideological center and refusing assimilation at all costs. This story also points toward new contours of intersectionality, which is a helpful framework when considering the intersections of race and sexuality, among others. Additionally, this story mentions the creation of a “religion of the gut” and the reality that Anzaldúa creates a framework of relational religion, which she identifies as “spiritual activism,” that negotiates the inner–outer relationship of being in the world.

In this story, the development of a queer identity emerges – someone who is other, strange, abnormal, and marked with the “sin of her mother.” “La Prieta” is the queer one who negotiates both margin and center and avoids being trapped by either margin or center standpoint. She retreats into books and writing as a way to process and manage her queerness, an identity that marked her from infancy. This retreat is another level of her queer identity that spans diverse commitments to knowledge production and community involvement. The reflection of “La Prieta” as queer means that her journey into books, writing, and solitude destabilizes her Latin@ identity; her identity as strange and abnormal is now inflected by, and fluctuates with, her relationships with and to books and writing – ideas that continue to motivate her theories. This recognition ignites new directions and contours of one's identity with ideas, the desire that emerge resulting from the relationship with ideas, and the writing that surfaces as a result of these relationships with books.

Negotiating the queer identity of oneself with the strange relationships with books and ideas, writing, then, is the queer act, made stranger by one's own queer identity. This is the case for “La Prieta,” a dark-brown-skinned body, born with the mark of her mother's sin, whose desire transgressed normative labels and resulted in the flourishing of ideas, books, and writing. In short, Anzaldúa's writing charts new contours of a nascent queer theory. Narrative shapes “La Prieta,” both the person and the short story: the narrative of the books and ideas with which she engages and the narrative that her family tout as they all deal with this “mark” with which she was born.¹⁵

As Anzaldúa develops the narrative of “La Prieta,” religion, myth, and relationality all surface in the face of sex, desire, and identity. Anzaldúa negotiates these elements by carefully exposing the limitations of male dominance in the face of her own strangeness. In fact, Anzaldúa notes that it is the male children in the family that have the mother’s allegiance, a desire that transgresses “traditional” parent/child relationships. Power transpires from the mother to the males, and the physical intimacy of kissing and flirting also transpires from the mother and the male children. Anzaldúa notes that any type of physical intimacy between females is dirty and taboo, a sure transgression of the normative desires that manage the household. This emerging strangeness lurks in the house, Anzaldúa recognizes, and the narrative of “La Prieta” develops a deeper commitment to the desires that fall beyond the scope of the norms of relating. This is the way in which queerness shapes the narrative of “La Prieta”: it dominates normative desires and displaces normativities in preference for the strangeness that disrupts relational norms.

As the narrative develops, “La Prieta” is exposed as a wayward child, a person who inherently is strange to the norms and chooses the strangeness, because in the strangeness, she flourishes. This queerness, this strangeness, is similar to the strangeness of Latin@s within the dominant white society. Varying brown-skinned bodies flourish in the midst of their chosen and forced strangeness. They, too, negotiate a queer identity, but this queerness is often eclipsed because of the dominance of the compulsory heterosexuality and demand for “traditional” relationships and identities. What “La Prieta” offers Latin@s is a way to understand the shape and form of queer identities – that it is both the chosen and imposed strangeness that helps give birth to a queer identity, negotiating the dialectic of both the margin and center and resting in the space between these two standpoints.

The other thing that this narrative does is develop the intersection of race and sexuality, something that is not present in current Latin@ theologizing. The work of this intersection unmask the difficulty in one’s queer identity, that of counter-normative desires with existing commitments to the Latin@ community. Anzaldúa sees this difficulty and recognizes that people have varying and diverse commitments when it comes to the multiple identities that they embody. Negotiating these commitments means that we are attentive to the multiplying intersections of race and sexuality, intersections that reside on difficult terrain. Latin@ theology has not developed these intersections and has thus been absent when queer identities are centralized features of narrative. What “La Prieta” does is provide Latin@ theologians with a model of how to incorporate the intersections of race and sexuality with elements of desire, sex, and gender that destabilize normative renderings of bodies and relationships. What this story also does is create movement within the terrain of sex, desire, bodies, and queerness. “La Prieta” unmask the movement inherent in the multiplying intersections that race and sexuality have. This is important for any development of a Latin@ queer theology.

The last constructive aspect of “La Prieta” is that Anzaldúa points toward an eschatological horizon, something that will be taken up in the last section of this chapter. It is important to mention it here, though, because the shape and form of a future world (Anzaldúa calls this “El Mundo Surdo”) begins with post-normative narratives and a “religion of the gut.” The creation of the theory of spiritual activism for Anzaldúa is the

queer and relational (perhaps even material) religion that stems from a self-in-relation. This is a queer standpoint that should not go unnoticed, a standpoint that requires careful attention to all relationships around oneself and the self-in-relation. This is the work of weaving inner and outer selves and creates a new narrative that is identified later as spiritual activism in Anzaldúa's work.

Often when theologians think about narrative, it is a unidirectional task, not supported by notions of sex and desire, nor enfleshing the trajectory to invite elements of relationality. When narrative is queered, it becomes a relational event whereby sex and desire become part of the narrative, and in this story written by Anzaldúa, narrative is joined by several different rituals where sex and desire play a significant role. This reality also helps further materialize identity in queer ways, showing that when identity intersects with other standpoints, an assemblage identity emerges. This is the queer feature when narrative is "done" queerly.

A Latin@ queer theology of narrative pays significant attention to the role of sex and desire in that narrative may even complicate it by counter-normative roles of relationality and ritual. In the case of Anzaldúa's story "El Paisano is a Bird of Good Omen," it is marriage and family that complicate the story of love, sex, and desire, and later in "La Prieta" it is the role of strangeness that supports a new framework of desire. The whole of the community, earth, and bodies are brought into the first story to help shift and shape normative readings of the ritual of marriage, relationality, love, desire, and sex. In the second story, elements of strangeness and identity proliferate and create multiple movements with identity, and further open up identity to accept multiple queer features. Both stories contain strong elements of queerness; the narrative is driven by these queer elements and identity, rooted in struggle, develops throughout the text not as a marginalized identity, but as a queer identity. The development of a Latin@ queer theology could benefit by paying careful attention to the role of narrative and ways that listening to our ancestors and neighbors fortify our theological standpoints that point toward the intersection of ethics, ontology, and epistemology – a recognizable queer framework that has great potential to shape and form a Latin@ queer theology.

The Ethico-Onto-Episte-mology of Latin@s as (a) Queer Politics

Latin@ theology has provided a significant rubric for understanding how Latin@s are in the world, how they engage in knowledge practices, the role of community, and how diverse relationships help Latin@s become in a world that is constantly forcing them to assimilate to a white norm. Latin@ theology has also provided a significant ethical, ontological, and epistemological framework for understanding the existential reality that Latin@s endure as they navigate multiple communities and determine how or whether they will assimilate or resist. Queer politics is rooted in anti-assimilationist politics, a politics that refuses to accept normative practices and/or politics that result in

assimilating to the ideological center. While I argue that everything is politics (and certainly the personal is political), recognizing new trends in ethics, ontologies, and epistemologies helps solidify a new contour in queer politics.

Central to Latin@s' being in the world is their life of struggle, assimilation, and resistance. These three elements often exist simultaneously, and these three themes are taken up in Latin@ theology, but queer issues of ethics, ontology, and epistemology (all of which are informed by queer theory) have not been paired with Latin@ theology. As I understand the development of queer theory, it spans ethics, ontology, and epistemology and has become a transdisciplinary project fortifying these three philosophical domains. I should assert that neither these philosophical domains nor the queer intervention is an attempt at contriving a cohesive paradigm of being, becoming, and acting; it is just the opposite: a queer being, becoming, and acting in the world is strange, counter-intuitive, and absent from Latin@ theology, but when paired with Latin@ theology, a new epistemological and ontological strand emerges, thereby initiating new forms of acting in the world. This praxis of queer politics jettisons assimilationist politics and thus informs a post-normative political framework that works to expose the in/between spaces for a queer politics to emerge. I see the ethico-onto-episte-mology as part of the emerging queer politics for Latin@s, igniting new forms of agency, that does not overlook struggle but seeks to consider a larger analytic framework in considering queer politics for Latin@s.

To suggest that there is a Latin@ queer politics is to suggest that ethics, ontology, and epistemology, braided together in a tripartite manner as a way of thinking, organizes a new contour of queer politics. And so one ventures into the realm of Latin@ theology and "does" it like a queer. To do this work, I consider Gloria Anzaldúa, again, and José Esteban Muñoz.

Gloria Anzaldúa paved the way for a queer politics, informed by a *mestizaje* reality whereby mixing and in/betweenness were a central feature of her theorizing, always becoming different in itself. To chart a queer politics, I suggest looking to theorists who privilege the intersections of ethics, ontology, and epistemology, and Anzaldúa is one such theorist who works in/between these three philosophical domains. Part of the queer in(ter)vention for Latin@ theology and politics is to consider the theoretical and analytical spaces that fall in/between theory and praxis. I suggest that Anzaldúa's *mestizaje* does this work of privileging in/betweenness and fortifies a queer politics that can be useful for a Latin@ queer theology. Considering queer politics is the intentional act of queering *mestizaje*. This act is an important theoretical concept for Latin@ theology and ethics, because it helps give shape and form to the difference and multiplicity existing in Latin@ communities. *Mestizaje* highlights both material and discursive realities that create gradual but significant moves of resistance in communities that tend to assimilate. *Mestizaje* materializes the capacity to take on new material and discursive features when we think of it in queer and political terms. In many ways, one could say that everything is political and everything is *mestizaje*. Yes! But managing this reality is the work of queer theory and queer theorists. When we step away from stabilized categories of *mestizos* and *mestizas* that stem from stabilized notions and categories of race, and allow for *mestizaje* to flourish beyond a biological racial category, *mestizaje* becomes

a queer reality – a materially queer essence without identity.¹⁶ By this I mean that mestizaje is no longer stabilized by the singularity of biology and stabilized gendered categories; it is disruptive when it acts like a gerund, becoming different and multiplying in its becomingness. This allows for mestizaje to be analyzed from an ethico-onto-epistemological standpoint; this is a standpoint that is always becoming different as a result of mestizaje's analytical *retorcer* and *volverse*. These two terms help illustrate and elucidate my attempts to queer mestizaje in that it twists and turns (*retorcer*) and it is also a process in its becoming/ness (*volverse*). This, I believe, has important implications for Latin@ theology and ethics, and creates a creative and critical process whereby critical openings for theology and ethics are deployed as a queer analytic enterprise in a world of collapsing differences and unified disparities.

Because mestizaje is an important theological category for Latin@ theology, I mention it here as I think it creates the conditions of possibility for queer theory to intersect with an existing Latin@ theological category. Reaching back to the reality that narrative informs theory, mestizaje is one such category that has been shaped by existing Latin@ narratives and works at the intersections of ethics, ontology, and epistemology, though often it has not been recognized as contributing to an ethico-onto-epistemology. Situating mestizaje as a queer feature that has the potential to shape (a) Latin@ queer theology means that one must undo traditional and normative understandings of mestizaje as a biological racial descriptor, and extend to it the material and discursive realities that create the conditions of possibility for it to be a queer signifier.

One question that emerges for me is: why is it important to open up this discourse of in/betweenness when it comes to queer Latin@ identities and politics in a way akin to that for the racial/ethnic identities? I think of the in/between space or *nepantla* as a creatively generative space where becoming is central, and becoming takes on new forms in that it helps produce knowledge (epistemology) and shapes actions (ethics). Take, for example, the category of family in Latin@ communities. Given the importance of family in Latin@ communities and the way relationality plays such a significant role for Latin@s, choosing relationships and choosing family is one important outcome in this work of queering mestizaje. The opportunity to “choose” a relationship that is in/between family and not-family is one way to queer, twist, and turn normative relationships into something that becomes accessible and important; doing this ignites new forms of politics that work at the intersections of ethics, ontology, and epistemology and generates new narratives that further shape an emerging Latin@ queer theology. Utilizing an agential realist account of human agency in finding the space in/between chosen and bio families helps us also discern the choice of staying in, for example, an often oppressive Catholic Church and needing to find another source of divine inspiration, spirituality, and connection, and imagine ways in which we can create a new, non-oppressive Catholic Church. The intentional act of queering mestizaje opens up new directions for relationality to emerge in/between institutionalized religion and queer spiritual practices, in that this work and discourse of becoming and materiality imagine the building of bridges between existing normative frameworks and other non-normative, counter normative, or post-normative realities. Queering mestizaje is working in the in/between spaces of ethics, ontology, and epistemology, and

generates new forms of queer politics that privilege the in/between standpoint, producing new forms of material knowledge that help motivate an emerging Latin@ queer theology. The in/between standpoint becomes the primary theological locus from where theological reflection happens and ignites the intersections of ethics, ontology, and epistemology. It is this moment of disruption that a Latin@ queer theology creates an epistemology and ontological irruption.

Queering mestizaje and looking toward the MezQueerTaje¹⁷ reality is one step in the process of the politics of difference and multiplicity, a political reality that every nepantler@ engages when they choose to engage differently by allowing themselves to become something other in the in/between space that mestizaje creates. Engaging in the critical and creative space of in/betweenness casts a new light on issues of futurity for queer Latin@s. This light becomes part of the very material thing that allows for in/betweenness to disrupt the normative stasis of reality and emerge as a becoming reality when one engages in the politics of queering of mestizaje.

Second, José Esteban Muñoz charts a performative path, transgressing normative politics in his work on disidentifications. For Muñoz, disidentification is a category of analysis that he theorizes in his book *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (1999). He says that disidentification is meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship. Disidentification is always and necessarily a critical process aiming at no less than the radical reformulation of the transcendental operators governing any world. Disidentifying creates space in/between normative politics to radically disidentify with strategies and norms that further root standpoints within a binary framework.

José Esteban Muñoz has further clarified that disidentification is not a 'new' fashionable theoretical concept, the latest in the line of intellectual commodities for the knowledge market. While it is not new, I suggest that disidentification become the starting place or point of departure for US Latin@s to reimagine their gendered political identities and attempt to move beyond the binaries that stabilize bodies and genders. In his introduction, Muñoz defines disidentification for us. Disidentification is a helpful framework because for some, "disidentification is a survival strategy that works within and outside the dominant public sphere simultaneously" (Muñoz 1999: 4).

To raise up the space in/between is a political act in which ethics, ontology, and epistemology are readily engaged. Disidentifying and engaging with the queering of mestizaje gives significant political leverage to reimagine a new political horizon where binaries are replaced with and by holistic frameworks of difference and multiplicity.

A more holistic framework might be what Gloria Anzaldúa would call "spiritual activism," which is a "religion of the gut" and oscillating between self and other. The reality is that difference and multiplicity proliferate in Latin@ communities, but these differences and multiplicities are often shaped by singular, normative, and traditional frameworks that eclipse difference and multiplicity. This is why disidentification is central to the formation of an ethico-onto-episte-mological framework; it creates little

moves against destruction as one commits to disidentifying. It is important to recognize the commitment to disidentifying with normative strands of identities and practices existing in place. Doing this creates the conditions of possibility for a queer politics to take shape, new narratives to emerge, and a new future horizon to come into being.

Latin@ Theologizing, Queerness, and the Future: Latin@ Moral Imagination Is a Queer Future or Living in a Not Yet Queer Future

The theme of future and horizons appears throughout Latin@ theology. Often, this is written as an eschatological feature of the theology. For queer theory, themes of futurity are also present in the work of Lee Edelman and Leo Bersani, among others. I wish to highlight the eschatological features of José Esteban Muñoz' work on utopias and queer futurity. Bridging together Muñoz with existing Latin@ theology concerning the future might help create a new opening for bridging together Latin@ theologies and queer theories.

Living in the context where communities are forced to assimilate to dominant society, Latin@s might very well lose hope as they imagine a future complicated by forced migration and assimilation, rather than a life forecast on resisting norms and ideologies. Muñoz works to stimulate elements of hope and futurity as redeeming qualities of queer communities of color, and demands that hope is something one cannot afford to lose in the face of forced assimilation. Muñoz theorizes about utopia and urges queers of color to "cruise" ahead to find the utopia and embody hope. This is a highly relational theory that counters existing queer theories focusing on futurity. I think Muñoz' work might help be a bridge in thinking about the intersection of Latin@ theologizing and queer theory that ties together the existing themes in this chapter.

Muñoz begins his *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* with a declaration: "Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future" (2009: 1). This declaration situates Muñoz in a "camp" that privileges queer as a performative category that seeks to initiate new horizons of being and becoming. It is an epistemological and ontological category for Muñoz that speaks to ways of acting in the world. In many ways, this future or eschatological horizon is part of the moral imagination that Muñoz theorizes. This is important for theology, since there is a focus on the future, redemption, and relationality. Muñoz' work pairs well with constructive moves within Latin@ theology and offers Latin@ theologians a bridge from which they can braid together theology and queer theory.

"Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (Muñoz 2009: 1). Latin@

theology attempts to also create constructive moves that are predicated on the possibility of another world – a more holistic, just, equal world where Latin@s are not outside of the margins and displaced from the ideological center. Muñoz focuses on the role of hope in his theory of potentiality. This potential world, also recognized in theology as the “reign of God,” privileges the role of hope in the creation of such a framework. Rejecting the here and now for Latin@s means rejecting the second-class citizenship to which many of us are relegated, and also claiming a type of citizenship that may not be recognized by having “papers.” This eschatological standpoint is one that requires a significant epistemological break with existing theologies and critical social theories. It demands attention to what can be and become as a result of refusing the status quo and quotidian theories that are death-bringing, further marginalizing bodies of color. Muñoz’ theories, paired with Latin@ theology, invigorate a new strand of morality that materializes in new contours of moral imagination serving to establish a future of hope and a horizon that privileges the standpoint of the margins of the margins, instead of the ideological center. Reimagining the moral imagination from this perspective re-energizes the intersection of Latin@ theology and queer theory as something that can indeed materialize in the face of destruction and displacement.

Suggesting that Latin@ theology should live in the not yet queer future establishes the eschatological horizon that is neither here nor there – it is a not yet reality that is relationally compatible with Latin@ theology. When exploring a queer theory of the “not yet” framework, Latin@ theology answers with its own “not yet” framework. Latin@s’ struggle is for a “not yet” reality, and introducing the queer utopian framework of José Esteban Muñoz is precisely the theory that fits best with existing Latin@ theology. Muñoz argues for a new, potential world, and Latin@ theology is arguing for the same – be it in the work of a *mestizaje* Christianity or in an epistemological break that renders the becoming future of Latin@ theology. The eschatological vision of both Muñoz and existing Latin@ theologies should be in conversation; I believe this helps solidify a queer future for Latin@s.

Conclusion

What is central to Latin@ theology is narrative, resistance, identity, and the future. I have set out to pair these themes with queer theory and “do” a queering of these theological elements. To do that requires working in/between theories and domains. It also unmask a new framework that points toward a utopian horizon where the reign of the Good, the Beautiful, and the True is manifest. This utopia is the potential that is unmasked when narrative, resistance, identity, and future are queered. When a “religion of the gut” materializes, this potential world takes shape. What is true is that this chapter points toward a relational theology in conversation with a relational queer theory, displacing the white norm of both domains.

The difficulty of this exercise has been to negotiate the particularities that are inherent in both Latin@ theology and queer theory, and also recognize that there are multiple ways of deploying Latin@ theology and queer theory, the least of which is showing only one way of them intersecting. It is true that this intersection of Latin@ theology and queer theory is burgeoning, unmasking the real potential of both Latin@ theologies and emerging queer theories. There remains much to be explored at this intersection that can build on what is presented here in this chapter. If anything, this chapter is an attempt at beginning the conversation of the intersection of Latin@ theologizing and queer theory, exposing the intentional transgression of both disciplines and the joy that comes from the work situated in/between these two domains. I hope that what comes after this chapter in the intersection of Latin@ theologizing and queer theory will be a theology *en conjunto* and show the multiplicity and differences that are central to both Latin@ theology and queer theory, because that will be the ongoing queer work of Latin@ theologizing and the materialization of a potential new theoretical world.

Notes

- 1 I readily note that “queer” is a hotly contested term, unable to be stabilized in any clear fashion. I use this term in multiple ways, often canceling and erasing previous uses. It is popular among younger folks to refer to their own being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. Even “straights” use this term to characterize themselves as being different from the sexual “norm.” Among Latin@s, a new term has emerged: jot@ or jotería. This term is equivalent to the term “queer” in English. Other terms that are often used are patlache, marimache, and raro, among others. Attempting to use Eurocentric and US American queer theory in conversation with Latin@ theology might, for some, be problematic. I use the dominant form of queer theory simply as a point of departure to create jotería moves in the study of Latin@ theology.
- 2 To do this very critical and important work, I look in unlikely places to bridge together diverse queer theories and Latin@ theologies. One such place is the work of Queer Chicanas, and of Marcella Althaus-Reid.
- 3 I will not attempt to normalize homosexuality or queerness with Christian theology, produced by Latin@s. This chapter hopes to unmask the contours of queer theory and Latin@ theology without advocating for a politics of assimilation or cohesion. In other essays, other theologians and I have argued that normalizing homosexuality and Christian theology has actually work against LGBT communities and queer persons. Normalizing homosexuality with Christian theology, I argue, is yet another way that Christian theology recolonizes issues concerning sex and sexuality. I hope that this chapter helps imagine queer theory and Latin@ theology in the postcolony.
- 4 I discovered this language while corresponding with Dr Jorge Aquino. He helped me think about Latina feminist theology as a twin-root system.
- 5 This is a phrase I coined while doing a systematic project on the work of Ada María Isasi-Díaz and María Pilar Aquino. I know of no other person using this phrase to talk about their work.

- 6 To date, there is no US production of queer Latin@ theology. There is the theology of indecency seen in the work of Marcella Althaus-Reid, but this work has yet to be called “queer Latin@ theology.” It is often referred to as “queer theology.” The task of this chapter will be to chart a path for a queer Latin@ theology, which from all my research does not exist. In some ways, a queer Latin@ theology has only existed in the lived bodies of queer Latin@s and materialized in conversation. I have been privileged to be a part of these conversations with other Latin@s. Some of my conversation partners are Orlando Espín, Jorge Aquino, Peter Mena, Wendy Arce, Lauren Guerra, and Jared Vazquez. Many of these conversation partners are ones with whom the conversation is ongoing and not dependent on face-to-face time, being mostly by email correspondence, but I have been grateful when we are able to gather face to face in places such as Princeton Theological Seminary during the Summer Workshop of the Hispanic Theological Initiative.
- 7 To date, there are only a couple of “out” queer theologians and ethicists doing the work of queer Latin@ theology and ethics who have published material. I am most familiar with the work that I have done and the work that Vincent Cervantes has done. We both en flesh a radical queer commitment to disrupting normative theologies and ethics; we call this a queer intervention in Latin@ theologies and ethics.
- 8 There are several ways that scholars write Latina and Latino: Latino/a or Latin@ are common ways to type out this term. I utilize the “@” as a way to not place the “o” or the “a” as an appendix, or prioritize one over the other.
- 9 *Lo cotidiano* is a term that readily translates into “lived experience.” Used heavily by Latin@ scholars and throughout Latin@ theology, the term was popularized by Latina feminist scholars. This is an important feature of Latin@ theology, since women’s experiences are often eclipsed in all of theology, even the classics of liberation theology. To use *lo cotidiano* here in this chapter is important, because so much of LGBT and queer experience is perpetually displaced or eclipsed in all dominant theology. To raise up *lo cotidiano* as an important feature of bridging together Latin@ theology and queer theories is to also suggest that marginalized and excluded lives matter.
- 10 *Conjunto* is a term that means “together.” Latin@s often talk about a theology *en conjunto* – a theology that is done together, in community.
- 11 This phrase is something I borrow from Andrea Smith.
- 12 Adapted in part from Brooker (2003).
- 13 Sandra K. Soto wrote *Reading Chican@ Like a Queer: The De-Mastery of Desire* (2011). I borrow this phrase from her.
- 14 Three main texts that have been influential for a North American/US Latin@ theology use narrative and conversation as a way to shape the published material: *Reading from the Edges: The Bible and People on the Move* (Ruiz 2011), *Mestizo Christianity: Theology from the Latino Perspective* (Bañuelas 1995), and *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology: Religion and Justice* (Aquino, Machado, and Rodríguez 2002). There are others that could be named that have focused on narrative, but I mention these, since struggle and difference are a key component of these texts. These three books take seriously the lived experience of Latin@s, the struggle for a humane life, compassion and justice, and attempt to articulate the Latin@ vision for the reign of God. US Latin@ theology is a decidedly North American “liberation” theology that seeks a discourse that renders all humanity equal, despite ongoing struggle.

- 15 The “mark” refers to menstruation in infancy, and Anzaldúa writes extensively about this.
- 16 “Essence without identity” flourishes in the work of Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman, queer theorists who work on post-normative issues in queer theory.
- 17 I am grateful to Dr Carmen Nanko-Fernández, who gave me the gift of this term (MezQueerTaje) in the winter of 2013. She has invited me to use it in my work on queer mestizaje.

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CHAPTER 19

Feminist Theory and Latina Feminist/Mujerista Theologizing

Nancy Pineda-Madrid

A commitment to liberationist theology has always been the hallmark of Latina feminist/mujerista theologians. Ironically, even though this commitment has been advanced and deepened largely through our ongoing use of feminist theory, we have paid insufficient *critical* attention to the role of feminist theory in our work. And without feminist theory, this theological discourse would labor forward in halting fashion, lacking the capacity and strength to robustly sustain its liberationist theological agenda. By making transparent Latina/mujerista theologies' use of feminist theory, this chapter furthers a critical appreciation of the ways that feminist theory carries this theological discourse more directly toward its emancipatory goal.

There exists a widespread misconception that “feminist theory” is primarily the domain of Euro American scholars working at educational institutions in the United States or Europe. This misconception has led many to wrongly surmise that when feminist theory is being elaborated by women scholars of color or scholars writing in the global South, these thinkers are simply borrowing from the contributions of first world feminists to develop their own arguments and, accordingly, to the erroneous charge that Latina feminist theory is not *sui generis*. This chapter seeks to dispel this misinformed position. On the other hand, while a long tradition of feminist thought can be traced in Latin America and among Latina scholars in the United States, the rigid application of identity politics to determine which theory ought to be employed in the constructive work of Latina feminist/mujerista theologizing impoverishes this work and, in the end, does not serve its high aims. At its best, Latina feminist/mujerista theologizing draws on a wide range of theory in the development of its claims.

Within the discourse of US Latina/o theology, Latina feminist/mujerista theologies still suffer another misunderstanding. Most, but not all, Latino theologians write

theology ignoring the many contributions of Latina feminist/mujerista theologians. These theologies are either, at worst, ignored, or, at best, treated as an addendum to *real* theological work, meaning work done by Latino men. In the process, Latina feminist/mujerista theology is marginalized, certainly methodologically and often discursively as well. Moreover, this position tacitly assumes that critical thinking about gender does not warrant serious theological attention. Needless to say, there are many different ways to frame a chapter such as this one. Given this second common misunderstanding, this chapter will address itself to the ways feminist theory has enabled Latina feminist/mujerista theologizing to elaborate its examination of some of the foundational issues and classic themes of Christian theology.

This chapter offers an initial response to the following question: how has feminist theory been used to open up and extend Latina feminist/mujerista theologizing, specifically in areas of foundational theology (i.e., the aim of our theologizing, human experience as a *locus theologicus*, theological knowing) and, as a consequence, influenced Latina feminist/mujerista readings of questions in theological anthropology, the doctrine of God, among other Christian themes? Through engagement with feminist theory, Latina feminist/mujerista theologies have sharpened their claims and become a more mature discourse.

Latina feminist/mujerista theologies, along with other feminist and womanist theologies, privilege women's experience for several reasons.

1. Women's lives have long been ignored as a subject worthy of critical reflection. The difference gender makes has been viewed with indifference by most theologians, most of whom are men who themselves benefit directly by maintaining a position of indifference to gender.
2. Further, by critically analyzing the lives of women, feminist theory privileges a more vulnerable segment of the populations and, by extension, the lives of others who tend to be overlooked and marginalized stand a greater chance of benefiting from this practice. The best of feminist theory analyzes the interlocking nature of multiple forms of oppression (classism, racism, heterosexism, militarism, ageism, and discrimination against the disabled, among other forms). This is not a given – admittedly, some segments of feminist theory have developed to the benefit of white middle-class women alone. But through a focus on women, the discourse of theology is nudged a bit further along a path toward placing the most disenfranchised at the center. Relatedly and significantly, feminist theory has clarified the interrelated nature of the domination of women and that of the earth and the cosmos taken as a whole. As a consequence, feminist theory advances not only the liberation of all peoples but also the liberation of the earth/cosmos.
3. Feminist theory focuses not only on naming the ways women experience oppression but also on envisioning the flourishing of women's lives. It is critically important to draw out, name, and delineate the multifaceted dimensions of women's flourishing. It supports women as active agency and subjects of their lives.

4. Moreover, feminist theory listens to the experiences, stories, and narratives of all women, with particular attention to the enormous diversity that is found among women, a topic further explored later (Jones 2000: 5–7).

To examine the ways feminist theory has enriched Latina feminist/mujerista theologies, we must begin by clarifying what is and what is not Latina feminist theology, mujerista theology, and feminist theory. By making clear the goals of each, their grounding concepts and central questions, we will see their scope take shape. The major part of this chapter addresses the way Latina feminist/mujerista theologians have used feminist theory to make more precise the way they conceive and construct their theological claims, and have sought to reframe theological discourse as a whole. Particular attention is given to theological anthropology and the doctrine of God, and salvation. The conclusion proposes some future avenues for the use of feminist theory in Latina feminist/mujerista theologies. I use the term “Latina feminist/mujerista theologies” to draw attention to the whole body of theological work that employs a feminist hermeneutic even though it has been named variously, which will be addressed in what follows.

What Is in a Name? Grounding Latina Feminist/Mujerista Theologizing

Latina feminist/mujerista theologizing grew out of a time when consciousness raising – in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation – took center stage in the United States. The civil rights movement of the 1960s had an enormous impact on Christian churches, so much so that this awareness spawned groups like *Las Hermanas*, *Womenchurch*, and the Women’s Ordination Conference, among other gatherings. The mid-1980s saw the emergence of the first expressions of Latina feminist/mujerista theologizing, with the goals of giving voice to Latinas’ desire to realize their full humanity as well as furthering the transformation of all societal structures that rain down injustice on women and men alike. From the beginning, this theologizing project has sought to underscore the liberating core of the Christian tradition, transforming this tradition so as to free it from its patriarchal and kyriarchal¹ elements, which invariably undermine the best of the Christian tradition. This theologizing does not rest content with modest changes to this tradition and to society (inclusive language, women in positions of leadership and authority) but, rather, advocates for a much more thoroughgoing transformation of Church and society so that a liberating social vision rains down on all human beings, with particular attention to the plight of women, who have disproportionately suffered multiple forms of oppression (Pineda-Madrid 2010).

‘Mujerista theology’ began with the work of Ada María Isasi-Díaz, a Cuban American Catholic, and her collaboration with Yolanda Tarango, a Mexican American Catholic activist. Isasi-Díaz spent her life developing this theology, by drawing on Latina women’s experience as a source and norm for theological work. Isasi-Díaz chose the term ‘mujerista’ as an expression of Latinas naming themselves. This theologizing attempts

to answer the question, "What would theology look like if it was genuinely life-giving or liberating for Latinas?" (Isasi-Díaz 1996: 62). This discourse recognizes the political possibilities present in our theologizing, and accordingly, *mujerista* theology advances a liberating social vision of the world that encourages Latinas in their development of moral agency, in their desire to speak their theological wisdom publicly, and in their struggle to flourish in life rather than merely to survive. This vision constitutes liberation by enabling Latinas (1) to develop a conscientization of their deeply internalized oppressions, (2) to transform oppressive societal structures, and (3) to constantly strive for a conversion from sin. *Mujerista* theology is distinctive in the ways it draws upon feminist theory, particularly in its use of meta-ethnography and in its distancing from the term "feminist," which *mujerista* theology regards as alienating. Even so, *mujerista* theology and Latina feminist theology employ a feminist hermeneutic (Pineda-Madrid 2010).

However, other Latina theologians who employ a feminist hermeneutic identify their work as "Latina feminist theology." This term recognizes the long history of feminist movements in Latin America as well as the critical feminist theories developed there. As María Pilar Aquino, a Mexican Catholic, has correctly argued, we must not make the mistake of thinking that the term "feminist" was transplanted from a white, first world context. "Latina feminist theology" affirms the import of the historical roots of Latin American feminism. Aquino, the early proponent of "Latina feminist theology," makes significant use of socio-political and economic theory for the purpose of analyzing the predicament of Latinas (and marginalized men) and using this to fund a liberative theological vision, a theological interpretation. "Latina feminist theology" signifies a wide range of distinctive expressions, in other words; it is an elastic name that has been stretched in a variety of ways by several theologians. It is not as closely tied to Aquino's particular approach to theologizing as *mujerista* theology is to Isasi-Díaz' work. *Mujerista* theology remains closely identified with Isasi-Díaz because she named it as such, and she played a singular role in advancing a *mujerista* theological method for well over two decades. The distinctiveness of her approach will be examined further. Neither of these two terms when used alone – *mujerista* theology and Latina feminist theology – can accurately represent the writings of all Latina theologians committed to feminism (Pineda-Madrid 2010).

Obviously, not all Latina theologians publishing today employ a feminist hermeneutic. Recognizing as much, this chapter engages a sample of the many contributions of Latinas who explicitly identify their work as feminist or *mujerista*, and who have made a sustained contribution to feminist and/or *mujerista* theologizing. These theologians all see women's experience as not merely a source for the development of theology, although undoubtedly it is that, but also as a norm for theological work. Accordingly, if theological discourse does not directly and explicitly contribute to heightening the full humanity of women (and marginalized others) and does not critique the systems of oppression that limit human flourishing and the flourishing of the earth/cosmos, then it cannot be termed feminist.

The use of feminist theory in Latina feminist/*mujerista* theologizing enables these discourses to be self-conscious about the ways in which oppression is named and

analyzed, and the ways in which a new future might be imagined. In other words, what are we doing when we think through our experience of sexism, classism, racism, heterosexism, and the like? How can our theorizing help us to discover and increase our propensity for good action as well as our desire to promote the flourishing of Latina women and all others? The effective use of feminist theory enables us to analyze and clarify our practice of thinking on both an individual and a collective level so that we are more aware of and transparent about our primary assumptions and norms. These function dynamically, yet often in a masked way that can serve to further the oppression of Latinas or to advance their full humanity and, at times, contribute to both of these opposing ends. Latina feminist/mujerista discourse employs feminist theory so as to make plain our far too often hidden assumptions and norms. Through the use of theory Latina theologians strive to offer a credible interpretation of our practice of thinking. Indeed, our use of feminist theory not only abstracts from our experience but also enriches it in full measure. When it fails in the latter then its effectiveness must be questioned.

Simply put, feminist theory advances a more precise naming and critique of women's oppression, and a more robust vision of women's flourishing. It interrogates various mainstream academic disciplines. Yet its texts are not limited to mainstream theoretical work but extend to include poetry, literature, music, song, the visual arts, and film, among other genres which engage in an imaginative practice of critiquing thought and culture. Like every theoretical discourse, feminist theory also has its own grounding concepts. Even though the goal of feminist theorists is to liberate women, this is not intended to suggest that only women are in need of liberation, but is rather a recognition that for far too long women's experience has been ignored as a subject worthy of critical reflection, and that today we are far more aware of how detrimental this has been to women. While women enjoy a preferential option, this must be qualified, leading to a second point: the flourishing of women never stands alone. Women's fate and future, according to Serene Jones, are invariably interconnected with those of all other persons and of the whole natural order (Jones 2000: 4–6).

Third, the leading edge of feminist theory recognizes the interlocking nature of many forms of oppression. While gender is a fundamental analytical category of feminist theory, the leading edge of feminist theory takes the categories of race, class, and sexual identity as equally fundamental and not merely as modifiers to gender. So much so, for example, that feminist theorists have turned to intersectionality to address the multifocal lenses of these categories and as a mainstay in the field of feminist sociological theory. Intersectionality analyzes the interplay or intersections of various forms of oppression in women's lives. This theoretical contribution suggests that different forms of oppression shape each other as they have an impact on women's lives. Finally, in order for feminist theory to respect the differences that exist among women, it must not take women's distinct stories and experiences and fit them into analytical categories too quickly (Jones 2000: 5–7). While these four leading ideas ground much of feminist theory, significant work remains ahead. Indeed, feminist theoretical discourse has increasingly taken on the various epistemic hegemonies

that still mark a great deal of this work. Short of this strategy, feminist theoretical discourse will continue to undermine its own aims.

While Latina feminist/mujerista theologians draw on many currents of feminist theory, it is of particular importance to recognize their use of Chicana feminist theory and the rich vein of Latin American feminist theory that likewise grounds this theologizing. The Chicano Movement of the 1960s swept forcefully through the U.S., particularly in the southwest and west, as an instantiation of the civil rights movement. Chicana feminism's origins in the late 1960s can be traced to this time of ferment. Chicana feminist thought can never be rightly interpreted as a response to Euro American US feminism, but rather must be interpreted as *sui generis*, as emergent from the socio-political aspirations of Mexicanos/Chicanos and of other Latinas/os as they sought to dismantle the racist and sexist policies and social structures of twentieth-century US institutions such as public schools, voting rights, land rights, labor rights, police brutality, and the like. As the collection *Chicana Feminist Thought* demonstrates, Chicana/Latina feminist consciousness became increasingly more sharply critical and vocal as Chicanas took on major leadership roles in *el movimiento* and yet were generally excluded from exercising their leadership in public forums (Garcia 1997). Within *el movimiento* two camps of women emerged, and Chicana feminist Anna NietoGomez captures well this internal debate: "Many loyalists felt that these complaints from women ('feminists') were potentially destructive and could only divide the Chicano movement. If sexual inequalities existed they were an in-house problem which could be dealt with later. However, right then and there, there were more important priorities to attend to, e.g., Vietnam, La Huelga, police brutality, etc." (NietoGomez 1997: 89). She and her feminist colleagues went on to argue that Chicana feminism had to be integral to *el movimiento*, birthing a feminist discourse that continues to this day to offer critical feminist reflection on Latina/Chicana experience. Chicana feminist theory has informed the theological contributions of Jeanette Rodriguez, María Pilar Aquino, Nancy Pineda-Madrid, and Theresa Torres, among others.

In addition, Latina feminist theologizing has drawn on and will continue to make effective use of the theoretical tools offered by the rich history of feminist thought in Latin America. As Ofelia Schutte makes clear, even though the institutionalization of feminist philosophy, for the most part, dates from the 1980s, original proto-feminist contributions have been made for centuries.² For example, these can be found in the writings of philosopher and poet Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1651–95, Mexico); social activist Flora Tristán (1803–44, France and Peru); and political theorist Lola Rodríguez de Tió (1843–1924, Puerto Rico); and in the moderately pro-feminist work of philosopher Carlos Vaz Ferreira (1872–1958, Uruguay). In 1918 he published the book *Sobre Feminismo* ("On Feminism"). By the middle of the 1990s a number of journals and publications together demonstrated an established feminist theory discourse in Latin America: *Debate feminista* (Mexico), *Estudos Feministas* (Brazil), *Isis Internacional* (Chile), *Feminaria* (Argentina), and *Hiparquía* (Argentina) (Schutte 1999). Latin American

feminist theory has informed the work of María Pilar Aquino, Michelle Gonzalez, and Mayra Rivera, among others. Additionally, in the early twentieth century Vaz Ferreira, while a critic of Pragmatism, nonetheless saw the value of its methods for the development of his Latin American feminist work (Oliver 2012). More recently, echoing Vaz Ferreira's intuition, Pineda-Madrid has also found pragmatism a useful interlocutor for her work.

Attention to Chicana feminist theory and Latin American feminist philosophy make clear that Latina scholars have engaged in a long struggle against kyriarchal domination, and have produced their own distinctive history of critical discourse as a reflection on and in response to these struggles. Latina feminist/mujerista theologizing has made effective use of these contributions. Having clarified briefly the origin and nature of Latina feminist/mujerista theologizing and the aim and scope of feminist theory, particularly as found in Latina/Latin American theory, I next examine the way that feminist theory has deepened and advanced foundational issues of Christian theology, having an impact on the interpretation of its doctrines.

With Our Lives at Stake

Latina theologians employ feminist theory to sharpen their focus and expand their capacity to understand the workings of categories such as "human experience," "knowledge of God," "grace," "salvation," and the like. In much of theological discourse, the workings of these categories – particularly in ways they culturally construct gender, race, class, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, and the like – have been rendered opaque. By using feminist theory to interrogate these categories, Latina feminist theologizing has become far more effective at recognizing the way cultural constructions of interlocking forms of oppression have often remained obscure, yet with a detrimental impact on Latinas and many others. If we are committed to theological discourse as liberative of women and men, then these patterns of Christian thought must be laid bare. Moreover, feminist theory not only aids in analysis and critique but also furthers the reorientation of these categories and the naming of new, more efficacious categories. This intellectual spadework enables Latina feminist theology to remain true to advancing a social justice paradigm in its theologizing.

What follows is an examination of the ways several Latina feminist/mujerista theologians have employed feminist theory. This examination is by no means a comprehensive overview but rather draws forward several examples as illustrative of how theory has been used. I make no attempt to synthesize a diversity of positions but allow the distinctiveness of these theologians' claims to speak for themselves. While several classic loci distinguish the field of systematic/constructive theology (e.g., theological anthropology, doctrine of God, christology, soteriology, mariology, and ecclesiology, among others), when we examine the assumptions embedded in a given theologian's development of these themes, we move into the field of foundational theology. This area

of theology considers a number of issues, such as human experience as *locus theologicus*, the use of scripture and tradition in theologizing, the nature of revelation and our knowledge of God, the *sensus fidei*, and theological method, among others. I go on to consider how Latina feminists have used feminist theory to address a few of these issues.

A Vision of the End of Our Theologizing

Praxis of liberation

At their most basic level, all Latina feminist/mujerista theologies ground their work in a praxis of liberation that cultivates and affirms the full humanity of women as well as men by recognizing women's role in the achievement of a more just world. How one achieves this particular end varies among these theologians.

Isasi-Díaz's mujerista theology argues for the pre-eminent role of Latinas' voices, a position that carries import in a number of ways, one of the most important being the empowering action of naming oneself. Here the work of Black feminist theorists and theologians who named themselves "womanist" encouraged Isasi-Díaz in her selection of the name "mujerista." She decided against the use of the term "feminist" because she believed that it carried historical baggage within Latino/a communities, since many associate the term with Euro American hegemony. She felt that Latinas need a term that reflects at once the struggle for daily bread as well as an affirmation of who we are as Latina women embracing our race and ethnicity. For her, "feminist" remained too strongly associated with the ways Latinas have been marginalized by the Anglo feminist community. Moreover, for her, the pre-eminence of voice meant that the community is the primary theologian, and this has a greater priority than the work of academically trained theologians. So the praxis of liberation is achieved in mujerista theology by enabling Latinas to come into their voices and to radically transform unjust social structures. (Isasi-Díaz 1990) This approach is likewise informed by the work of feminist thinkers (e.g., Chilean author Isabel Allende and political theorist Nancy Hartsock) and their conception of power as the ability to advance self-realization and the transformation of the world.

Yet this is not the only approach. María Pilar Aquino's intellectual strategy differs significantly. She argues that liberation necessitates and builds upon a critical analysis of systems that impoverish and marginalize women (and men). This critical analysis, often using Latin American feminist theory, must inform the progress of a liberative theological vision. Gender oppression, consequently, is analyzed in an extended and in-depth fashion that theorizes racial, class, cultural, ecological, and religious hegemonies. Her work foregrounds a serious critique of the imperialistic, globalized economy that destroys the lives of poor women (and men), and the lives of marginalized people in the geopolitical South. Her analytical commitment extends beyond socioeconomic and historical forces to include ideological worldviews. For her, the transformation of oppressive structures cannot develop without the effective use of feminist theory and

philosophy because they make transparent the contours and substance of women's oppression. Moreover, Aquino's approach emphasizes women's role in the production of knowledge. The interpretation of the analysis of systems, says Aquino, must be done in light of Christian faith (Aquino 1993).

Critical feminist norm

"Women's experience" signifies a range of meanings, and regularly serves as a source for Latina feminist/mujerista theologizing. It is a source, for example, when women's narratives or literature function as a point of departure for the development of theological idea or claim, or are used illustrate a particular point or to expand a line of thinking more fully, or are privileged in the reading of scripture. For Latina feminist/mujerista theologizing, women's experience as a source, while always necessary, is nevertheless insufficient.

For Latina feminist/mujerista theologizing to be feminist, a foundational commitment to the full humanity of women must serve as an explicit norm. A theological norm is a pre-eminent value that orients the whole of a theologian's project. Indeed, advancing the full humanity of Latina women serves as a measuring stick for Latina feminist/mujerista theologies. Accordingly, scholars evaluate and critique these theologies on the basis of the degree to which they do or do not achieve this norm. Much of María Pilar Aquino's work has been devoted to clarifying the nature of a critical feminist norm, a task in which feminist theory plays the leading role. Her delineation of this norm involves the ongoing development of discursive strategies that both take down kyriarchal domination and forge a more just world. She constructs a plural socio-political movement and subject that function as a force for the creation of a world of greater equality and human flourishing for all. Aquino argues that, in light of our faith, we must evaluate and judge our theological activity on the basis of its capacity to further the "historical actualization of social justice," with particular attention to the experience of Latinas (Aquino 2002: 136).

While feminist theology must not be narrowly reduced to the political, neither can it ever be entirely separated from the political. All theological discourse, claims Aquino, whether consciously or not, carries a political impact which must be analyzed critically. The theoretical tools to make this impact transparent and to equip Latina feminist theologizing with the capacity to more effectively pursue its goal can be found in the writings of Latina/Chicana feminist theorists (e.g., Cherrie Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, Chela Sandoval, Marta Cotera, Anna NietoGomez, and Alma M. García, among others). As already discussed, this feminist discourse emerges out of a historical movement and fully recognizes Latina/Chicanas as authors of this struggle. These theorists seek to achieve an "oppositional feminist consciousness," and to that end their writings offer a "critical framework to analyze systemic injustice, both locally and globally, to determine effective strategies for its elimination and the actualization of authentic justice" (Aquino 2002: 136).

A public discourse

Our critical feminist theological norm necessitates that we be conscious of the public(s) we address. Anything short of this means that we slip in the rigor of our work and compromise what we intend to achieve. Is our work addressed primarily to the theological academy, and if so, which one? Is our work addressed to the church and the Christian faithful? Or, to a believing community that is inter-religious? Do we envision ourselves as public intellectuals speaking to society, relating our theologizing to present-day challenges? And with any of these, as well as many other publics, what is the scope of the public(s) we are addressing? Given that Latina feminist/mujerista theologizing repeatedly makes a preferential option for the experience of Latina women, to what extent does our theologizing “with” and “from” the experience of Latinas function to limit our “public(s)”? And function to expand our “public(s)”? This, of course, is one way of framing the challenge of identity politics in our theologizing. Might the preferential option for the experience of Latinas be expanded in a way that does not merely seek a place for Latinas at the theological table but, rather, advance it, because in making a preferential option for those who are least among us – which often means Latina women – we are making the world better for *everyone*? Of course, this way of framing our preferential option exemplifies an expansion of our public.

The “public” character of our theologizing has been explicitly and insightfully interrogated by Michelle A. Gonzalez. She has raised questions such as: what makes our theology “Latino/a”? To what extent does our theology include other marginalized groups? What is the political, public impact of identifying our work as “Latina feminist theology” or “mujerista theology” (Gonzalez 2011)? If we are to have an expanded understanding of our publics, then we must not use our ethnic/racial identities as the platform for making theological claims of so-called greater authenticity for Latinos/as. Identity politics has too often functioned to narrowly and detrimentally circumscribe our idea of the “public.” US Latino/a theology, she says, has developed too limited a vision, seeing its work as primarily addressing the “ecclesial realm” and the “North American theological academy.” As a result, we have little to no impact outside these realms, which are, in the end, too limited. She draws on many theorists, among them Linda Alcoff and Linell Cady, to interrogate and analyze an expansive meaning of “public.” In many respects Gonzalez’ clarion call has begun to be answered with the work of texts such as *Feminist Intercultural Theology* (co-edited by María Pilar Aquino), which argues that our theologizing must be widely intelligible, appealing to those beyond our community of faith, a goal we achieve through our fierce critique of the social injustices in our world. In the process, we radically transform and extend the space of our theologizing (Aquino 2007). Similarly, Nancy Pineda-Madrid’s *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez* calls for an expanded public through her use of Latin American theorists in her analysis of the subversive use of religious symbols to confront the growing tragedy of feminicide. She argues that the lives of women today and in the future are at stake if we fail to dismantle the kyriarchal, socio-political dimensions of our world. Both

of these theologians extend Latina feminist theologizing so that it is in dialogue with Latin American theologians and scholars (Pineda-Madrid 2011).

Human Experience as *Locus Theologicus*

The problem of difference

While Latina feminist/mujerista theologizing has invariably privileged Latina experience as a source and norm for theologizing, the problem of difference, namely, the enormous, substantive differences that distinguish Latinas from one another, has been always at the forefront. Not all Latinas have the same experience of race, class, sexual orientation, colonization, history, and geographical region, among other dimensions. Moreover, a dynamic and evolving matrix of interlocking dimensions shape each Latina's life experience so distinctly that treating Latinas' experience as a universal, singular reality severely compromises this theology's commitment to emancipatory praxis. For example, throughout her theological work Isasi-Díaz argued that in order to advance the liberative orientation of mujerista theologizing, she needed to completely avoid essentializing or universalizing Hispanic women's experience. Indeed, the vision and commitment of mujerista theology necessitates providing a public platform that allows Hispanic women to share their experiences in their own words, so that this sharing might enable Hispanas to more fully become subjects of their own lives and history.

Isasi-Díaz turned to the work of a number of sociologists and anthropologists and used a feminist hermeneutic in her employment of their theory. First, informed by ethnomethodology, she embraced the value it places on practical rationality born of reflection on daily life experience (*lo cotidiano*), and that it places on measuring the quality of research, on the basis of how well her observations lined up with the way the person being described would describe themselves. This approach to research is reflexive, by which I mean that its integrity rests upon the recognition of the person being described.

Second, Isasi-Díaz used ethnographic interviews in which she asked Hispanas about their life stories and faith journeys. She coupled this ethnographic research with meta-ethnography, which reads the results of the ethnographic research in a manner that does not synthesize the differences among the various voices but rather honors the specific identity and voice of each interviewee. What is privileged is the daily life experience of each woman and the practical knowing that comes from that experience. In Isasi-Díaz' words: "Ethnography and meta-ethnography provide understandings and techniques that make it possible to discover, organize, present, and interpret the source of mujerista theology: the lived experience of Hispanic Women" (Isasi-Díaz 1993: 73). These theoretical tools enabled her to further her commitment to keep Hispanic women's voices alive as well as particular, and to form the foundation for her inductive approach to theologizing. Indeed, in her development of a mujerista theological anthropology, she draws out themes that do not obscure the differences among the

Latina women she interviewed. So her anthropological themes of “la lucha (the struggle), permítenme hablar (allow me to speak), la comunidad/la familia (the community/the family)” (Isasi-Díaz 1996: 128) further underscore her commitment to the liberation of Latina women through a public recognition of Hispanic women’s voices, enabling them to become agents of their own history. According to her, the flourishing of Hispanic women depends on this kind of approach (Isasi-Díaz 1996: 128–47).

After Isasi-Díaz, the most developed use of ethnographic theory can be found in the work of Theresa L. Torres, who used this approach to study a group of Guadalupanas in Kansas City and their drive to save a shrine honoring Guadalupe. In her work, she interprets the interplay of the Guadalupanas’ religious beliefs and identity, the role of female agency within a patriarchal system, and the circumscribed self-understanding of female power exhibited by them. Like Isasi-Díaz, Torres drew on the work of feminist theorists – and in particular Chicana feminists – to orient her use of ethnography and to focus her research analysis on questions of female agency and leadership within the Catholic Church. In brief, Torres’ study raises many questions which reveal not only a liberating but also a limiting self-understanding of the Guadalupanas. Torres describes this self-understanding as a cognitive dissonance or paradox. Her careful use of ethnography and Chicana feminist theory enables her to document the complex, conflictual, and contested terrain of leadership empowerment found in this one group’s Guadalupan devotional practice. Importantly, this work shows the influence of a *mujerista* theological method and lays the foundation for Torres’ future theological contributions (Torres 2013).

Subjectivity and agency

Related to the problem of difference is the foundational work that some Latina feminist/*mujerista* theologians have done to scrutinize the formation of Latina identity and the way this conditions Latinas’ sense of subjectivity and agency. Drawing on feminist philosophy, Michelle Gonzalez has advanced an intellectually rigorous and nuanced consideration of this concern. She acknowledges the debate between two extreme positions: those arguing for an essentialized conception of women’s experience based on the idea that sexual identity is biologically determined and, at the other end, those arguing for gender as socially constructed to the point where biological sex is all but irrelevant. Gonzalez situates her own position in the middle of these extremes by drawing on María Longones’ work to make sense of the hybrid, complex dimensions that inform identity. Gonzalez recognizes relational and contextual realities as playing a substantial role in the formation of identity, obviously including sexual identity. Drawing on Iris Marion Young, Gonzalez argues that there are social, political realities exterior to a given woman’s life that, nonetheless, condition her life, thereby giving rise to a matrix of decisions that she invariably faces. What she chooses informs how gender will be expressed in her life. Further nuancing her position, Gonzalez employs the contributions of Sheila Greeve Davaney and Linell Elizabeth Cady, both of whom foreground the impact of women’s historical experience of being marginalized, yet are cautious not to attenuate the diverse

ways that women have chosen to respond to this history. Indeed, both women's self-understanding (subjectivity) and their capacity to act in the world (agency) reveal the scope of women's experience as a source for theological activity. This careful delineation by Gonzalez comes into full expression when she demonstrates its necessity in light of her argument for a Trinitarian *imago Dei*. We cannot understand *imago Dei* anthropology, says Gonzalez, apart from our reflection on the nature of God (Gonzalez 2007: 133–60).

Informed by several philosophical currents, Mayra Rivera addresses these same concerns. She holds that “theologically God’s transcendence is inseparable from theological anthropology” (Rivera 2007: 128). Yet for her, while this God–human relationship is absolutely necessary, it is not sufficient. She considers human relationality, subjectivity, and agency as grounded within a living cosmic reality. Thus the cosmos and human beings both participate in divine transcendence. This participation is constituted and mediated by an infinite web of relations that she suggests might be described as a kind of “third” dimension of reality. This “third” both orients human beings to our origin and forms the basis of our subjectivity. To clarify further what she means by this participation, she uses the work of feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray, among others, to develop her claim that growth in intimacy with God and intimacy with others are, invariably, a concurrent, inter-related journey. We are unavoidably and always in relation to other beings and to God. These can never be rightly understood as distinct. Her model of relational transcendence takes seriously the enlivening spirit that infuses the materiality of all life and creation even to the point of constituting our inter-creaturely relationality. In her words,

Divine touch and cosmic creation are, to be sure, not only conditions of a historical past, but the continuing reality of the world in which we live and encounter one another. . . . God is thus seen as that multiple singularity that joins together all creatures – creatures that are themselves irreducible in the infinite multiplicity of their own singularity. In God is the beginning of diversity as well as their joining together, that which makes possible and receives the outcome of each inter-creaturely encounter – past and present. This radically inclusive reality relates us to one another while maintaining a space of difference between us. (Rivera 2007: 135, 137)

This space of difference between us is not a void but rather is best understood as a material space from which and in which we are nurtured even as we each bring diverse selves to this space. It is this space that makes possible our relational infinity. It is the space of our ethical negotiations and our experience of divinization – the space that makes possible continuous liberation. Irigaray’s work advances the precision of Rivera’s argument. She offers a theology of grace, naming graced nature as it extends through the whole natural order to the ends of the cosmos while always affirming the utter transcendence of God.

Theological Knowing

How we come to know and the function of theological knowledge have long been a central concern of Latina feminist/mujerista theologians. Aquino’s work challenges Latina and Latin American feminist theologians alike to employ theory in a muscular

fashion so as to take our theological knowing to a level beyond a mere description of our distinctiveness, and to a higher level by means of our employment of analytical, theoretical tools to more precisely examine our experience and thereby deepen our capacity to emancipate our communities. Throughout her writings Aquino argues for the use of various theoretical frameworks, most prominently for intercultural theory. Intercultural theory, as explicated by Raúl Fornet-Betancourt (2006: 22), offers tools to make us ever more acutely aware of the end toward which we work, and, with that end in mind, to transform the way we value our present time and our particular context.³ This transformed understanding better equips us to know what matters most now, and to know how we might engage what matters most. An intercultural framework encourages us to embrace our experience of knowing as marked by “epistemological rupture.” This rupture is brought on by two or more culturally distinct approaches to knowing, creating an experience of polyphonic epistemologies. Polyphonic epistemologies show us how context and the historical partiality of knowledge break open truth in novel ways. Intercultural theory not only takes seriously our diverse space/time cultural contexts, but also offers a fresh reading of liberationist theologies by building on the insurgent moral forces of our time and suggesting a model for how we might live together in solidarity with one another (Aquino 2007: 9–28). This eschatological philosophy underscores our movement away from relations of domination and subordination, and toward a greater participation in God’s truth through the creation of a culture of just and humanizing relations.

These are but a few examples of how Latina feminist/mujerista theologizing has employed feminist theory in the elaboration of its discourse. There are, of course, many other examples equally significant.

Considering Our Future

So how might feminist theory contribute to the future development of Latina feminist/mujerista theologizing? Without a doubt, intercultural theory and intersectionality will only grow in their importance for this discourse. Intercultural theory, through its attention to the end of our theologizing as well as the interplay of distinct cultural groups, will continue to help us privilege epistemologically and hermeneutically our own ways of knowing, thereby deepening our theological vision. Intersectionality, with its analysis of the convergence of various forms of oppression on both a personal and a collective level, will sharpen further the rigor of our self-naming and of our understanding of our interactions with other groups on the margins. Both of these will aid theologians in clarifying the complexity of our socially constructed, multidimensional selves and communities.

Yet another set of haunting questions must be asked: to what extent do men have a stake in Latina feminist/mujerista theologies? If we argue that patriarchy and kyriarchy are bad for men as well as women, then what is it that occludes a clear vision of this for men? Said differently, at what point does a feminist theological revolution become men’s work? On the assumption that the full humanity of men depends upon a self-critique of male privilege, why is it so difficult for men to see how sexism diminishes their own

humanity? Masculinity studies, which in part owes its origins to feminism, has begun to explore these questions. Undoubtedly, men and masculinity studies will expand our theologizing. These are but a few of the trends in theory that will provoke a reimagining and a new maturation of Latina feminist/mujerista theologies.

Notes

- 1 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza distinguishes kyriarchy from patriarchy. Kyriarchy is "the Greek word for the domination of elite propertied men over women and other men, whereas patriarchy is generally understood in feminist discourses in terms of western sex/gender system which posits a man/woman opposition" (Schüssler Fiorenza 1984: 211). More specifically, Schüssler Fiorenza clarifies that the "neologism kyriarchy-kyriocentrism (from Greek kyrios meaning lord, master, father, husband) seeks to express this interstructuring of domination and to replace the commonly used term patriarchy, which is often understood in terms of binary gender dualism. I have introduced this neologism as an analytic category in order to be able to articulate a more comprehensive systematic analysis, to underscore the complex interstructuring of domination, and to locate sexism and misogyny in the political matrix or, better, patrix of a broader range of oppressions" (Schüssler Fiorenza 1999: 5). See also Schüssler Fiorenza (1992: 114–18, 122–5; 1994: 36).
- 2 For a discussion of the development of contemporary feminist philosophy in Latin America as well as its antecedents, see Schutte and Femenías (2010) and Femenías and Oliver (2007).
- 3 See also Fernet-Betancourt's (2009) work documenting the difficult relationship between women and philosophy in Latin America.

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CHAPTER 20

Theologizing Immigration

Victor Carmona

Migration scholars Stephen Castles and Mark Miller (2009) describe our times as “The Age of Migration.” The reasons are evident: 232 million persons worldwide were migrants in 2013, slightly more than 3 percent of the global population (United Nations 2013). This means, according to the International Organization for Migration (2010), that “one out of every 33 persons in the world today is a migrant.” Were migrants to live in a single country, it would be the fifth most populous in the world. While immigration debates across North America and Europe tend to highlight the public’s hopes and fears about immigration from Southern countries, international population movements reveal a polycentric world in which Northern countries are not the sole alternative that immigrants pursue as their destination. As a case in point, the United Nations (2013) reports “South–South migration is as common as South–North migration.” In 2013, 82.3 million migrants who were born in the South were living in another Southern country while 81.9 million were living in the North; that is, slightly less than half.

The interdisciplinary study of migration has developed since the early 1960s. In 1964, the Congregation of the Missionaries of St. Charles, Scalabrinians, established the Center for Migration Studies, which publishes one of the earliest peer-reviewed journals on the subject: the *International Migration Review*. More recently, migration scholars have broadened their study from “the *determinants, processes and patterns of migration*” to include research, as Castles and Miller (2009: 20) explain, “on the *ways in which migrants become incorporated into receiving societies*.” The focus of their study thus spans the migratory process, which includes three phases: immigration, settlement, and minority formation. The implication for theological scholarship is direct. A narrow conception of migration may lead to the incorrect conclusion that Hispanic scholars

have only recently begun to reflect on its meaning and significance; a broader conception (per the practice of migration scholars) reveals their longstanding contributions.

Since the early 1980s, US Hispanic biblical scholars, theologians, and Christian ethicists have published works that address immigration in one of two ways: either as an important aspect of US Hispanic experiences, or as having meaning and significance as a distinct experience in and of itself. While there are outliers (Deck 1978; Lara-Braud 1982; López 1982), as a general rule, Hispanic scholarship on immigration favored the former approach from the early 1980s until the early 2000s. Since then, Latino(a) scholars have begun publishing texts that bridge two bodies of academic literature: the mature body of US Hispanic/Latino(a) theology *and* the nascent literature on immigration theology and ethics. In doing so, they are contributing scholarship that possesses a unique ability to engage the breadth of the migratory process. The literature review that follows highlights scholarship in the Anglophone world.

Reflections on Immigration within the Literature of US Hispanic Theology

The geographic and chronological coordinates that define US Hispanic theology point to its idiosyncratic relationship with immigration, the first phase of the migratory process. As Miguel Díaz (2001: 6) explains, the work of US Hispanic theologians “is not about ‘Latin Americans’ in the U.S. Rather, their theology reflects upon the contextual experiences of subjects who reside permanently in the U.S., yet whose roots (whether by birth or by familial heritage), lie in Spanish-speaking Latin America.” The research bears out the fact that while most US Hispanics have not experienced the first phase of migration, it marks their context nonetheless. According to research by the Migration Policy Institute (Britz and Batalova 2013), for instance, “[the] majority of Hispanics in the United States are native-born U.S. citizens. Of the 52 million people in 2011 who identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino, 36 percent (18.8 million) were immigrants.” As for the chronological coordinate, in 1972 Virgilio Elizondo (2009), Catholic priest and *padre* of US Hispanic theology, wrote “*Educación religiosa para el México-Norteamericano*.” The article, which marks the birth of US Hispanic theology, argues that the sociocultural context of Mexican Americans – much of it tarnished by discrimination within and beyond the church – calls for appropriate theological reflection and life-giving pastoral care. To that end, Elizondo acknowledges that immigration is an aspect of the Mexican American experience but presses the point that *it is not* the entirety of that experience. Mexican Americans, he writes (Elizondo 2009: 58), are “neither North Americans nor Mexicans.” His point was not to negate the significance of the Mexican immigrant experience within either the church or American society but to affirm the fundamental human dignity of Mexican Americans and their own culture. In the decades that followed, other Mexican American, Cuban American, and Puerto Rican theologians saw analogous needs in

their communities and forged appropriate responses (Segovia and Tolbert 1995; Bañuelas 1995; Fernandez and Segovia 2001).

The struggle against discrimination that Hispanic communities confronted across the United States became fertile ground for theological reflections that are telling of the second and third phases of the migratory process (settlement and minority formation). As missiologist Jorge Castillo Guerra (2008) notes, this phase begins once immigrants arrive. It is “an *inter* space, which is the space of struggle between the native culture and the resident culture” (Castillo Guerra 2008: 247). Nestled in these social locations, Mexican American, Cuban American, and Puerto Rican scholars have produced valuable texts on the meaning of hybridity in terms of *mes-tizaje* and *mulatez*. Carmen Nanko-Fernández has written the most comprehensive summary of this scholarship, much of it produced by authoritative figures in US Hispanic theology. In “Alternatively Documented Theologies: Mapping Border, Exile and Diaspora” she catalogues Latino(a) reflections on migration according to the social spaces and experiences that mark the identities of their authors (Nanko-Fernández 2013). She writes:

The border surfaces as primary focus for many of our Mexican-American and Tejan@ theologians. The theologies of Virgilio Elizondo, Arturo Bañuelas, Nancy Pineda-Madrid and others reflect the fluidity of life along contested fronteras. It should come as no surprise that reflections on exile are especially predominant among many of our Cuban-American interlocutors, see for example the work of biblical and culture studies scholar Fernando Segovia, theologian Justo González as well as *mujerista* [Christian ethicist] Ada María Isasi-Díaz. For our Boricuas, Nuyoricans and other dispersed Puerto Ricans like theologians Samuel Solivan, Edwin Aponte, Luis Rivera Rodríguez and biblical scholar Jean-Pierre Ruiz post-colonial interpretations open up experiences of diaspora and internal migrations – a complex relationship of being simultaneously colonized and imperial citizen, yet suspect enough to be detained in Arizona without probable cause. (Nanko-Fernández 2013: 35–6)

The US–Mexico border and the experiences of exile and diaspora have marked migrants and the broader Hispanic community with a distinct sense of “double belonging,” a knowledge that has bled into the scholarship of US Hispanic theologians. Castillo Guerra (2008: 248) describes such experiences as akin to “being *in-between* and *in-both*,” or to suffering “double denial, belonging neither to the territory of origin nor to the territory of destination.” As Nanko-Fernández recognizes, though, these categories have their limits. For instance, they cannot account for Mexican experiences of exile spanning the decades from the beginning of the Mexican Revolution in 1910 to the end of the *Cristero* Rebellion in 1929 (Matovina and Poyo 2000). They also cannot account as clearly for the experiences of Central American refugees and asylum seekers during the height of the Cold War in the 1980s.

Of the three phases of the migratory process (immigration, assimilation, and minority formation), particular attention to the second phase has given Latino(a)

scholars the ability to enrich the academic study of biblical hermeneutics, theological anthropology, and moral agency (among other contributions). Among Cuban Americans alone, one may find examples in the work of biblical scholar Fernando Segovia (1995, 2000), whose own experience of otherness challenged biblical studies to properly account for the hermeneutic implications of social location; the writings of theologian Roberto Goizueta (1995, 2011), whose unflinching attention to “the dehumanizing aspect of exile [in] its power to isolate the person from others and, therefore, from him or herself” (1995: 2) yielded a *teología de acompañamiento* that challenges Christians to rediscover an ecclesial identity that transcends borders; the work of Christian ethicist Ada María Isasi-Díaz (1995, 2001, 2004), whose early use of ethnographic research to study moral agency led her to warn Latinas and Latinos against idealizing *mestizaje-mulateraz* – a tendency that at times also mars reflections on migration. The brutal struggles that Hispanic women experienced at the heart of the second phase of the migratory process led Isasi-Díaz (2004: 204) to conclude that their identity in terms of *mestizaje-mulateraz* must be “a symbol of our truth-praxis” and thus “a call for social change so we can embrace diversity and live according to our own moral norms.” In summary, the literature suggests that their own struggles and identity challenge the US Hispanic community to a liberative praxis toward newly arrived immigrants. US Latino(a) scholars have heeded this call by contributing – from their own social contexts – to the nascent literature on immigration theology and ethics, to which I now turn.

Hispanic Contributions to the Literature on Theologies of Migration

Apuntes, the oldest academic journal dedicated to US Latino(a) theology, contains some of the earliest published theological reflections addressing immigration as a discrete topic rather than as an important aspect of broader US Hispanic experience. From 1981 to 1986 its authors reflected on the meaning of immigration, including the sanctuary movement, from multiple disciplines. Writers include biblical scholar Francisco García-Treto (1981), theologians Hugo López (1982) and Jorge Lara-Braud (1982), and historian Justo González (1985). Their texts break open four main veins of theological reflection on immigration, all of which still sustain scholarship. They assess the fundamental question of the meaning of “alien” in Hebrew Scripture, propose the need for “a Theology of Migration,” challenge American Christians to be faithful to the Reign of God by practicing neighborly love toward our immigrant brothers and sisters, and discern the stance that our faith calls for in relation to US immigration laws. The first Christian ethicist to reflect on immigration in the journal is Daniel Castelo (2003) through an article that critically engages Stanley Hauerwas’ *Resident Aliens* from the social location of actual “illegal aliens.” *Perspectivas*, the *Journal of Latin American Theology*, and the *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* have dedicated specific numbers in 2006, 2008, and 2011 (respectively) to immigration. Together, these numbers collect

useful scholarly articles written from multiple perspectives in terms of the authors' academic and social location (Espín 2006; Carroll R. 2007; Conde-Frazier 2008; Martínez 2011; Gilberto Ruiz 2011).

Although there are outliers (Wilbanks 1996), books demonstrating sustained academic inquiry focusing on immigration began appearing in the mid to late 2000s. Biblical scholars Daniel Carroll R. and Jean-Pierre Ruiz have written essential works (Carroll R. 2008; Jean-Pierre Ruiz 2011). Taking up different reading strategies, both authors address the debate over immigration reform in the United States by challenging their readers to discern a biblically informed stance. Carroll engages biblical texts that are traditionally associated with experiences of migration, refuge, exile, and sojourn, while Ruiz engages marginal texts or "little stories." Ruiz's *Readings from the Edges* may be of particular interest to scholars desiring a solidly researched book that engages post-modern hermeneutics to interpret rich, yet oft ignored, biblical texts. As a Mexican American moral theologian, I am partial to Ruiz's insights on language and identity politics in "'They Could Not Speak the Language of Judah': Rereading Nehemiah 13 between Brooklyn and Jerusalem" (Jean-Pierre Ruiz 2011). Biblical scholars interested in the latter prophets may find Gregory Lee Cuéllar's *Voices of Marginality* (2008) a useful source. Cuéllar reads the poetry of Second Isaiah alongside Mexican immigrant *corridos* to interpret their respective insights on the experiences of exile and return. Published articles by Gilberto Ruiz (2011) and Julian Andres González (2013) serve as exemplars of emerging voices in biblical studies.

Theologians Daniel Groody, Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, Gemma Tulud Cruz, and Gioacchino Campese have written insightful books addressing the meaning and significance of immigration within the Christian faith. Groody (2002) broke ground in the field of spirituality through research on the dynamics of conversion that immigrant men and women undergo in the midst of specialized retreats. These experiences heal the wounds immigrants suffer during the first and second phases of the migratory process (immigration, settlement). Reflecting similar concerns, Conde-Frazier (2011) is one of the few theologians who have written on the spiritual needs of immigrant children, perhaps one of the most theologically and pastorally underserved populations. Over twenty-five years after López (1982) briefly explored the possibility of advancing a theology of migration, systematicians Campese (2008) and Tulud Cruz (2010) developed new – and methodologically robust – accounts. Their works offer a truly global outlook on international population movements along with some of the most carefully crafted theological engagements with migration scholarship. Along those lines, Elaine Padilla and Peter Phan (2013) recently edited *Contemporary Issues of Migration and Theology*, the first of a planned three-volume collection. Padilla and Phan's project aims to contribute multiple theological reflections that engage the burgeoning global conversation within Christianity and among the Abrahamic religions on the topic of migration. In terms of the nascent literature on theologies of migration, this project may well be one of the academy's major undertakings of the decade.

Two additional developments within the field of theology deserve particular consideration. First, works by Espín (2007, 2013), Castillo Guerra (2008), and Tulud

Cruz (2010) point to the promising insights that lie ahead in research that intersects immigration theology, intercultural dialogue and method, and inter-religious dialogue. Padilla and Phan's project confirms this. The work of philosopher Raúl Fornet-Betancourt (2001) on intercultural dialogue will prove fundamental here. Second, works by Nancy Pineda-Madrid (2011) and Rafael Luévano (2012) on femicide at the US–Mexico border, and by Nanko-Fernández (2010) and Luis Rivera-Pagán (2013) on immigration, racism, and xenophobia, highlight the need for sustained critical engagement with the meaning and implications of unjust suffering and death for Christian communities.

Among Christian ethicists, three scholars stand out: Dana Wilbanks (1996), who published the first book-length theological-ethical analysis of US immigration policy; David Hollenbach (2008, 2010), whose research on the Catholic human rights tradition has led to groundbreaking collaborative projects on the theological-ethical study of refugee ethics and the institutionalization of refugee rights; and Kristin Heyer (2012), who, to my knowledge, published the first constructive book-length account of a Christian immigration ethic. Heyer's research deploys theological anthropology, Catholic social thought, family ethics, and the ethics of risk to analyze, interpret, and critique US immigration policy. Additionally, two Christian ethicists are advancing groundbreaking research on the practical responses by faith communities to the causes and consequences of ongoing forced migrations (including those fleeing life-threatening poverty). In her work, María Teresa Dávila (2012) analyzes the intersection between immigration and the middle-class lifestyle, especially among US Hispanics, critically examining their communities' commitment to social justice in light of their understanding of what Christian discipleship calls for. Susanna Snyder (2012) focuses on the intersection between immigration and social work, examining how Christian communities are responding to the needs of asylum seekers and detained immigrants. Faculty engaged in college service-learning courses should consider Miguel De La Torre's *Trails of Hope and Terror* (2009). This short book brings together multiple voices – including those of undocumented immigrants – and thus provides an effective glimpse of a broken US immigration system and its unethical consequences.

A review of the mature body of literature on US Hispanic theology and the nascent literature on theologies of migration suggests how Latino and Latina biblical scholars, theologians, and Christian ethicists are engaging the breadth of the migratory process through multiple academic disciplines. Yet the review also suggests that it is necessary to complement the keen awareness that US Hispanic theology has of God's stance in favor of the poor and marginalized (due to its liberationist strand) with accounts the Christian tradition offers to reflect on the inner life. Simply put, it seems to me that Thomas Aquinas can help us begin to understand why it is that Americans continue to befriend – and indeed fall in love with – undocumented immigrants. Thomas Aquinas' order of charity may serve to clarify the difficult moral questions that lie at the heart of the ongoing debate over immigration reform. While I do not explicitly deploy any sources from those I've listed in the review, they inform my stance in relation to the

texts. Further, I am a Mexican American moral theologian who has experienced the strengths and weaknesses of our country's immigration system. I identify with the unjust suffering that millions of undocumented immigrants and their US citizen spouses, children, and parents experience.

Immigration Reform: Insights from Thomas Aquinas' Order of Charity

In the following sections I draw resources from Thomas Aquinas' order of charity – which explains that human beings are naturally inclined to love God, self, and others in the context of family life and friendships – to argue that undocumented immigrants living in the United States must be legalized. While I accept that foreigners who cross the border illegally are responsible for their actions and while I also recognize that there are multiple dynamics driving undocumented immigration (Castles and Miller 2009), my focus here is on the tendency to ignore the United States' own responsibility in creating the current state of affairs. My broader aim in these pages, then, is to underline the need for American Christians to recognize some of the reasons that may have led us to where we are today: sharing our lives with 11 million undocumented immigrants, nearly 6.8 million of them from Mexico (Britz and Batalova 2013).

A Brief History of US Immigration Policy

Aristide Zolberg's *A Nation by Design* (2006a) suggests that present-day opponents in the immigration debate are failing to consider a basic fact: a fundamental purpose of American political institutions is to mediate among conflicting interests to reach a settlement. Early colonial assemblies, later state legislatures, and present Congress have all produced legislation to mediate a considerable range of opposing cultural and economic interests with respect to immigration. Historically, these interests form in response to the putative impact foreigners have on the two main goods that are at stake: the community's cohesiveness and its economic growth. In the past, the idea that the country's political unity – and thus its viability as an independent nation – hinges on shared cultural markers (religion, language, race) enjoyed consensus among its leaders. Yet, since colonial times, employers have recruited foreign manual labor that is culturally different from the bulk of the population – a necessity, from their perspective, to achieve sustained economic growth. In response, other Americans worried that the influx would weaken national cohesion and they fought to ensure that, once inside the country, those manual workers could not become US citizens. This basic political dynamic is still at work today.

Congress and its precursors have produced mixed settlements that piece together policy options that opposing advocates pursue (Zolberg 2006a). Since admission as an immigrant

affords the foreigner a pathway to citizenship, these legislatures created immigration preferences accordingly. Historically, they offered admission as immigrants to those who were economically and culturally desirable through the necessary regulations, including family preferences. In the case of foreigners who were economically but not culturally desirable, they offered business and cultural interests the ability to use strategies such as slavery, then indentured labor, followed by guest worker programs, and, increasingly, undocumented immigration to recruit disposable, noncitizen workers. As to those who were economically *and* culturally undesirable, Congress and its precursors targeted their outright exclusion (including pregnant women, the “mentally defective,” and alcoholics).

In sum, Zolberg’s research suggests that America’s legislators have attempted to exclude the foreign poor while simultaneously facilitating the recruitment of foreign workers in a manner that satisfies America’s economic needs and yet defers to its cultural aversions. Mexican undocumented immigration is, from this point of view, the latest iteration of a “back-door” preference system that gives American businesses the ability to recruit, according to Zolberg (2006a: 181), “a mass of permanently segregated noncitizen workers [who are] neither slave nor free.” The troubling prevalence of mixed status families suggests the United States has succeeded once again in creating such a permanent underclass.

A Brief Description of Current US Immigration Preferences

The Immigration and Nationality Act (INA from here on) provides the legal framework for the United States’ immigration system. On that legal basis, the federal government grants admission to foreigners in one of three ways: as asylum seekers and refugees who can prove persecution at home, as immigrants who intend to settle in the country, or as non-immigrants who intend to visit or work but not settle in the United States. My focus, though, is on the preference system which the INA sets in place to distribute immigrant visas (popularly called “green cards”) because failure here furthers undocumented immigration.

To allocate immigrant visas, the INA establishes a preference system that has three essential features. First, it treats “green cards” as a limited good. Congress establishes a yearly ceiling on the number of immigrant visas that become available. At the time of writing, the INA provides a global allotment of 675,000 “green cards” per fiscal year, and, by law, US officials may not distribute more than 7 percent of those to applicants from a single country. Second, “green cards” serve the needs of US families and businesses. It is they who petition the federal government for an immigrant visa on behalf of a foreign loved one or an employee. Of the annual allotment, Congress assigns 485,000 spots for family-sponsored visas (about 18,681 per country), 140,000 for employer-sponsored visas (about 5,396 per country), and 50,000 for distribution through a lottery program that excludes citizens from oversubscribed countries (such as Mexico). Third, the INA assigns greater priority to some cross-border relationships than others on the basis of marriage and degree of consanguinity. In the case of

employment visas, the applicant's skill is the determinant factor. Applicants who are backlogged must wait in line until a visa becomes available. Some waiting lines are over two decades long. The Department of State publishes a monthly *Visa Bulletin* with information on the availability of migrant visas or "green cards" for specific categories. In March 2014, for instance, family-sponsored visas became available for the unmarried sons and daughters of US citizens from Mexico who got in line on October 15, 1993 (United States Department of State 2014).

The caps, quotas, and queues of the US immigration system are unresponsive to the greater proportion of cross-border relationships that exist between Americans and immigrants from Mexico. They are unable to meet the demand for immigrant visas for citizens from those countries, a fact that compels US citizens, permanent residents, and employers to misuse non-immigrant visas – and even foster undocumented immigration – to ensure that their foreign loved ones or their potential employees join them in the United States. Specialists estimate that nearly half of the country's 11 million undocumented immigrants crossed the border with government-granted non-immigrant visas (i.e., as tourists), which they then overstayed (Passel 2006). The rest crossed the US border illegally.

The Troubling Case of "Mixed Status" Families

In March 2010, the Pew Hispanic Center estimated, 16.6 million people lived in mixed status families throughout the United States (Pew Hispanic Center 2011). It also reported that up to 54 percent of them, or 9 million people, lived in families that included at least one unauthorized adult and at least one US-born child. The Center further estimated that 4.5 million US-born children have at least one undocumented immigrant parent. For 70 percent of those American children, their parents are undocumented immigrants from Mexico (Passel and Cohn 2009). Additionally, one million children who belong to these mixed status families are themselves undocumented.

Research like the Pew Hispanic Center's suggests that a great majority of the 11 million undocumented immigrants who are living in the United States have in all but legal status become a part of American families and communities. Americans have freely befriended undocumented men, women, and children. The research bears this out. By 2010, according to the Pew Hispanic Center (2011: 3), "35% of unauthorized adult immigrants [had] resided in the U.S. for 15 years or more; 28% for 10 to 14 years; 22% for 5 to 9 years; and 15% for less than five years." These demographic details matter because they highlight the fact that mixed status families and communities – meaning most cities and states in the Union – have developed over long periods of time. These relationships, in short, are morally significant. They are not spontaneous, fake, or superficial. They are real and enduring.

The challenge of discerning ethical immigration preferences is theoretically and practically significant. On the one hand, Congress has the difficult task of setting preferences that value the familial and employment relationships that Americans and immigrants already share. On the other hand, Congress must do this as part of its responsibility to

create an immigration plan that politically settles a broader and more complex web of economic and cultural interests regarding immigration. The first task demands an acknowledgment of the millions of existing cross-border relationships while providing reasonable grounds to differentiate between them. The second task demands recognition of the political relationships that bind American citizens to one another, but not to foreigners (be they permanent residents or undocumented immigrants). The conundrum, then, is this: when it comes to their socioeconomic ties with American families and businesses, legal and undocumented immigrants are not strangers, but as to the civic ties that bind US citizens with one another, they are. On what grounds may Congress ethically account for a greater proportion of cross-border relationships between Americans and immigrants from Mexico? What insights does the Christian tradition offer?

Aquinas on Love and Charity

For Thomas Aquinas, love is a passion that it is deeply intertwined with reason (Aquinas and Dominicans of the English Province. 1981). A person may freely love a fellow creature, another person, and God because his or her intellect and free will are fitted to know and love the good of friendship in a way that is natural, sensitive and rational (ST I-II q.27, a.2). Charity, on the other hand, is an infused virtue that perfects and orders a person's intellect and will in such a way as to make it possible for him or her to apprehend the supernatural good of everlasting joy in perfect friendship with God and to freely love and desire such friendship (ST II-II q.23, a.2). Love, then, is a passion that moves us to attain the natural good while charity is a grace that God bestows on whom-ever God wills, giving that person the ability to attain a supernatural good: God's self. Nature gives us the ability to love, desire, and enjoy the beloved. Grace makes it possible for us to love, desire, and enjoy God as well as others for the sake of God.

The distinction between love and grace is subtle, but consequential. An external observer, for example, could not tell the difference between a wife who loves her husband for his own sake, even if he is an undocumented immigrant (i.e., as Aquinas would expect of true friendship), and a wife who loves her husband out of charity (i.e., for God's sake as well as his own). Charity does not suppress the natural inclinations that drive spouses to intimately love each other both physically and intellectually. It does, on the other hand, perfect those inclinations. That same wife, for example, may eventually suffer under the stress of being married to an undocumented immigrant. After many years, one may expect those circumstances (worsened by the lack of legal status) to break her will or to weaken her ability to perceive the good of their friendship as clearly as she did when they married. Perhaps she may be considering leaving him for her own sake (understandably so). Yet friendship with God may strengthen her will and clarify her intellect just enough for her to withstand the stress of his legal status – and its detrimental effect on their marriage – just one more day. This example is not intended to suggest that Christians should expect mixed status families to passively accept their lot

and simply count on grace to withstand such brutal, unjust suffering, thereby negating any need for immigration reform. It does, however, suggest how Aquinas' focus on the inner life can complement theological reflections that call for an awareness of the way in which God acts in the lives of the poor and the marginalized (Nanko-Fernandez 2010; Jean-Pierre Ruiz 2011; Heyer 2012).

Along with the previous examples, the distinction between love and charity leads to an appreciation of the way in which Aquinas' account of the order of charity provides an analogous account of the order of love. Stephen Pope (1994: 58) explains how so: "Thomas's interpretation of charity followed from the fundamental theological axiom that grace perfects, and does not destroy nature." The reason is that inclinations of grace and nature both flow, in Aquinas' own words (ST II-II q. 26, a.7), "from Divine wisdom." Pope goes on to identify two implications (Pope 1994: 58–9). First, "charity retains natural love, though the latter is given a new animating principle." Second, "the objects of charity – God, self, neighbor, and body – are materially identical with, though formally distinct from, the objects of love." There is, furthermore, a third implication. Charity and love retain the correspondence between the inward affection and the outward effect (ST II-II q. 26, a. 7). That is, the internal and the external acts of love – the intensity of one's affections and the kindnesses that enfold those affections – are consistent. For instance, one may not claim to love a stranger or an enemy internally by wishing them good, but then proceed to either ignore or harm them when they are in need. Conversely, one may not claim to love a stranger and an enemy, or for that matter a son and a fellow citizen, with the same affection (ST II-II q. 26, a. 6). Simply put, human nature is such that we may not love our neighbors equally. We tend to love some persons more than others because our inclinations, graced or not, are naturally drawn with a greater intensity to some than they are to others. As he is unfolding the order of charity in the *Summa*, then, Aquinas is also laying out the order of love.

Aquinas' Order of Love and Order of Charity

Human beings have an inclination to love some persons with a greater intensity because the lover and the beloved share a connection or fellowship that they may not necessarily have in common with many others. Aquinas identifies two primary kinds of connections (ST II-II, q. 26, a. 8): "friendship among blood relations [which] is based upon their connection by natural origin [and] the friendship of fellow-citizens [which is based] on their civic fellowship." When comparing both kinds of friendships, Aquinas reaches two conclusions (ST II-II, q. 26, a. 8). First, "that the union arising from natural origin is prior to, and more stable than, all others, because it is something affecting the very substance, whereas all other union supervene and may cease altogether." Aquinas' second conclusion is that "the friendship of kindred is more stable, while other friendships may be stronger in respect of that which is proper to each of them." Together, both conclusions offer a subtle account of the distinct ways in which the same lover may feel as

intense a love toward family and fellow citizens in the appropriate context. While family ties are more stable than civic ties, the latter may prove stronger than the former when it comes to civic matters. The experience of immigrants who take the Oath of Citizenship to become Americans illustrates this. They make the decision – pertaining to a civic matter – to renounce their previous political loyalties, but they also continue doing all they can to assist family members who remain in their birth-countries by helping them meet their material needs.

To determine the appropriateness of the intensity that he or she feels toward the beloved, the lover may discern the good that is at stake in each specific relationship. When it comes to “the providing of necessities,” Aquinas argues, the lover will feel a greater inclination toward kin, but when it comes to matters “where we are free to do as we choose, for instance in matters of action,” the lover will feel a greater inclination toward others, including fellow citizens (ST II-II q. 26, a. 8). Ultimately though, the lover in question, like all other human beings, needs both his or her family and other neighbors, especially fellow citizens, to attain the material and the socioeconomic goods that are necessary to survive and thrive in the world. (For the sake of clarity and focus I am excluding spiritual goods from this study, though they are as essential for personal and social flourishing.) In the context of immigration reform, the challenge facing Americans is loving family and country in a properly ordered way.

Aquinas’ insights into the rationale behind family unity and civic friendship suggest why Americans are naturally inclined to love undocumented immigrants as spouses, blood relatives, employees, and so on. In the case of family members who are undocumented, Americans experience a strong inclination that is more stable and stronger than any other relationship, particularly when it comes to providing for material needs. For instance, spouses will join together to do all that they can to provide for each other and their children. The fact that one spouse is a citizen and the other one is not does not strengthen or lessen the powerful inward affection that they naturally feel toward each other and their children. However, belonging to a mixed status family does lessen a spouse and/or parent’s ability to en flesh his or her love for the other spouse and/or for their children. They cannot provide material needs to their beloved in a life-giving, dignified way. The effect is similar in the case of political and socioeconomic relationships. Americans experience a strong inclination toward undocumented immigrants whom they personally know as friends around the local community and at work. Legal status does not influence the intensity of their neighborly love. It does, however (unlike the case of family relations), shut out the ability of Americans and undocumented friends to fully – and appropriately – join together to strengthen the commonweal politically, economically, and/or culturally. From this perspective, furthermore, it is reasonable for undocumented immigrants who belong to mixed status families to love and desire the commonweal as citizens do. Undocumented Mexicans have left their country of birth and remained in the US – at great risk to themselves and their American families – to pursue life as part of a community that makes it possible for them to provide for their family’s needs.

From a perspective informed by the order of charity, the fundamental rationale behind the principles of family unity and civic friendship is that Americans are

naturally inclined to know and love the good of friendship with immigrant spouses, children, parents, and employees. The immigration system in general and its preferences in particular must serve that good. The legal status of those immigrants, therefore, must carry less weight than the lives they have shared – in most cases for over fifteen years – in the context of American families, businesses, and communities. The fundamental powers of the lover's intellect and will to know, love, desire, and enjoy the goodness of friendship with another person are not affected by that person's legal or undocumented status. God lovingly gifts us all with the goodness of friendship so that we may live life in abundance, a goodness that foretastes the joy of perfect friendship with God and all men and women of good will. Aquinas, though, does leave us with a question: does immigration policy touch on matters of material need or on matters of the commonweal? Does it touch on matters of nature (over which, as creatures, we have a limited participation in freedom) or on matters of action (over which we have a greater degree of freedom)?

Just Love and the Priority of Mexican Undocumented Immigrants

The love that Americans feel as spouses, children, parents, and employers of undocumented immigrants is rational and properly ordered. Yet Aquinas' order of love leads to a question that underlines the difficulty that Americans in general and their legislators in particular face when discerning just immigration preferences: is the distribution of immigrant visas a matter of nature that touches the very essence of family life or is it a matter of action that relates to the commonweal (ST II-II, q. 26, a. 8)?

So far, Aquinas has offered grounds to suggest that when Americans love undocumented immigrants as their spouses, children, and parents they are acting out of their inclination to provide the basic needs of life for themselves and their loved ones. They do so because they must. Strictly speaking, they have little choice. It is their duty. Yet Aquinas also offers grounds to suggest that even if this were the case, the common good of the country is greater than or superior to other kinds of goods (ST I-II, q. 90, a. 2) The implication is that Americans in mixed status families should be willing to suffer the deportation of their loved ones because they broke immigration law and thus harmed the commonweal. The solution may well be to affirm that natural ties are stronger and more stable than civic friendship and therefore Congress should legalize the undocumented because Americans who love them are doing what they must. If so, however, the principle of family unity is nothing more than unfettered nepotism, leaving no check on that principle, no way of prioritizing some cross-border relationships over others, and no way of recognizing a people's right to determine how immigrants may become fellow citizens. Aquinas, though, offers another way forward.

Congress should grant priority to undocumented immigrants from Mexico who belong to mixed status families and legalize them out of a sense of beneficence toward the US citizens who love them. Beneficence toward these families and their communities is called for as a matter of just love. Further, beneficence better reflects the rationale

behind the principle of family unity and the common good, which most Christians affirm, as well as their complementarity.

Practicing Beneficence in Immigration Reform

Beneficence is an outward effect of charity. “Beneficence,” Aquinas writes (ST II-II q. 31, a. 1), “simply means doing good to someone.” It is an act of friendship. Being beneficent calls for a love that is properly ordered and thus calls for laying out priorities between multiple friendships, be they with family members, fellow citizens, strangers, or enemies. What would being beneficent entail for the American people and Congress in the context of immigration reform? It would require them to prioritize the needs of some cross-border relationships over others on the basis of properly ordered love. It would require them to legalize undocumented immigrants from Mexico.

Recalling an earlier point, properly ordered love calls for unequal love in terms of inward affection and its outward effect. When Aquinas argues this (ST II-II q. 26, a. 7), he is not implying that men and women should not inwardly love strangers or even enemies. Instead, he is challenging us to recognize that as embodied rational souls, human beings naturally enfold love by doing more for those for whom we have greater affection. In the case of enemies and strangers, this implies helping them when necessary and actually loving them with inward affection. Not with the kind or degree of affection that one would extend a parent, child, or even a fellow citizen, yet at least with the kind of affection that one is naturally inclined to experience toward a fellow human being who is in need and/or toward a sharer in the fellowship of happiness (i.e., as in charity). Aquinas describes this latter type of feeling as the love that one feels for the son of a friend. One may not particularly like the son, but one loves the son for the sake of the father (i.e., God). In the case of enemies, strangers, and blood relatives, then, it is necessary to distribute goods in a way that properly matches both the inward affections that a person feels toward the beloved and the kind of friendships to which they belong (i.e., does the good pertain to a matter of necessity or action, of nature or choice?).

Aquinas unfolds the order of love in a manner that highlights the role of practical reason when prioritizing different relationships along with the claims that are made and met within them. Interpreters of Aquinas’ order of charity tend to limit the function of practical reason to laying down a priority among the beloved by using ordinal numbers (first, second, third, and so on), neglecting reason’s task of matching the good to be distributed with the kind of friendship in which the claim for that good is made and met. Pope (1994) compares and contrasts both interpretations to specify when the needs of blood relatives should or should not receive priority over others. He writes:

Thomas did not view the order of charity as a simple system of concentric circles . . . , in which family and members of one’s own household come first, next close friends, neighbors

and associates, and finally others in an outwardly radiating gradation of various relations to the self (though this scheme is often adopted by philosophers, moralists, and, of late, sociobiologists). This simple scheme would only be appropriate if Thomas recognized one ultimate good and one basis for friendship, whereas in fact he had a more realistic sense of the pluralism of human goods and friendships. His interpretation of the order of charity recognized the importance of different spheres of life and acknowledged the need for different schemes of priority, depending on the various matters that are the basis of the different connections people share. Claims of kinship for Thomas were not assigned absolute priority, and only “trump” other claims in the arena of basic material well-being – and even here they have priority only when the degree of need is roughly comparable. (Pope 1994: 64)

Claims of kinship are not granted indiscriminate priority over the claims of strangers. Instead, they are granted priority when it comes to matters of material need. Yet Aquinas also recognizes that strangers may face urgent situations in which they have material needs as well. The same applies for enemies (ST II-II, q. 31, a. 3). Lacking families with whom they may secure their material wellbeing, under those circumstances it falls to fellow human beings to befriend them for the purpose of meeting their urgent needs. Here, again, Aquinas seems to warn us against extending such friendships for the sake of usefulness rather than for the sake of the beloved (ST I-II, q. 27, a. 1 and ST II-II q. 31, a. 3). If the former, such a friendship is concupiscent and will dissolve or wither away once the urgent need has been met. If the latter, then such friendship is true and virtuous and will lead to greater union with the stranger or the enemy. However, what is the proper priority among the claims of kin and stranger when they are similar, if not the same (i.e., when they compete for a permanent residency visa)?

Beneficence Toward Undocumented Immigrants in Mixed Status Families and Their Communities

In his analysis of beneficence, Aquinas brings up an objection that mirrors the difficulty that Congress and the American people face in the distribution of the limited good of permanent residency among multiple cross-border relationships. The question is this: when the claims of the poor and the stranger conflict with the claims of kin, which should receive priority? Aquinas replies (ST II-II q. 31, a. 3): “it must be understood that, other things being equal, one ought to succor those rather who are most closely connected with us.” Kin share natural ties around matters that pertain to material needs and when faced with strangers with those same needs, kin must be favored, both for their own sake and for the sake of the commonweal.

Through Congress, Americans acted to recruit undocumented immigrants from Mexico. Americans and undocumented workers befriended each other, perhaps at first with a concupiscent intention, but some ultimately fell in love. They became true friends who provide for one another as spouses do and/or they joined with others in common

cause as employers and employees do, strengthening the common good of their communities. Aquinas does not deny that conflict exists within and between each of these relationships. He simply argues that even then, it is possible to prioritize some over others in a way that reflects a love that is rational, ordered, and just – even if not always perfectly so.

In the context of immigration reform, beneficence calls for the legalization of undocumented immigrants who are part of mixed status families and their communities. Aquinas offers a theological-ethical rationale for understanding why it is that 85 percent of all undocumented immigrants have been able to live and work in the United States for five years or longer, establishing or deepening multiple kinds of cross-border relationships with US citizens. Congress's past actions have led to where they naturally had to. Now, the mixed status families that Congress's back-door preference system made possible are suffering under the strain of undocumented status. This is unjust.

The order of charity presumes that adult family members are duty bound to provide for each other while citizens are duty bound to work with each other toward the common good. If legislators were to lack beneficence toward undocumented immigrants because they broke immigration law, then, for the sake of justice, they must be beneficent toward their fellow citizens. In her analysis of the relationship between love and justice in the order of charity, Jean Porter (1989: 209) explains that Aquinas “upholds the order of charity by arguing that its violation would be an injustice to those to whom we owe special duties (2a2ae 44.8).” The relationship between both virtues is subtle and context dependent. At times, justice may call for placing restraints on the practice of charity, yet care must be taken to ensure that charity is not improperly restrained either. Thus, while Americans tend to be concerned about the injustice of legalizing undocumented immigrants, we should be just as concerned with unjustly violating the particular duties that Americans and undocumented immigrants from Mexico owe each other as husbands and wives, parents and children, and employers and employees. The latter possibility presents just as serious a threat to the common good as, if not more so than, the former.

Love, Immigration Preferences, and the Limits of Rule-Making

Aquinas unfolds an understanding of love as rational, ordered, and just. In so doing, he offers two insights. First, American Christians may turn to love and friendship to discern just immigration preferences that properly prioritize the needs of mixed status families and their communities. Second, his interpretation of the order of charity reminds us of the limits of rule-making. Simply put, no set of immigration preferences can be expected to resolve, once and for all, the question of how best to love our immigrant neighbors.

Across-the-board country quotas violate the particular duties that Americans and undocumented immigrants from Mexico owe each other as husbands and wives,

parents and children, employers and employees. When it set these quotas, Congress failed to recognize the strong natural inclinations that are the powerful driving force behind cross-border relationships, as is evident in the case of mixed status families. Such quotas are based on an abstract sense of justice that overly constrains the proper exercise of love and charity between Americans and the undocumented who are here, as Aristide Zolberg's history of US immigration preferences demonstrates, at our behest (Zolberg 2006b). While the quotas are meant to affirm the equality of all immigrants – to be morally inclusive in a way that is fair to all – Congress has also used them to force millions who are economically desirable but culturally undesirable to seek admission into the United States through the back door. Congress's desire to uphold an impartial, nationally blind admission policy has come at the cost of proper partiality toward undocumented immigrants and their mixed status families by its ongoing refusal to grant them legal status.

The order of charity suggests that Congress is misusing strict arithmetic formulae that reflect speculative reason (in the scholastic sense of the term). Instead, it must rely on practical reason to guide its discernment of which claims it must properly prioritize. In the context of existing cross-border relationships, Congress must prioritize the needs of undocumented immigrants from Mexico. Mixed status families can no longer wait, for their sake and the sake of the common good. From the standpoint of the order of charity, Congress's inaction is irrational, disordered, and unjust.

Conclusion

These sections have turned to Aquinas' order of charity to parse out existing cross-border relationships in a way that acknowledges the moral significance of familial and civic relationships. They have concluded that Congress must legalize undocumented immigrants who belong to mixed status families and abandon annual across-the-board per-country limits. Aquinas and Pope's insights on a love that is rational, ordered, and just are theoretically and pastorally useful to address the current immigration context.

Most Christian leaders in the United States, including Roman Catholic bishops, call for an immigration reform that maintains the principle of family unity. A few also base the need for more generous immigration levels on civic grounds, usually out of a sense of American exceptionalism. Their approach presents two problems. On the one hand, Christian leaders rarely explain what exactly they mean by the principle of family unity. They do not explain – from their faith-informed perspectives – why the pull that loved ones experience toward each other should have a normative hold on the government's immigration policy. On the other hand, while a sense of American exceptionalism may assuage some American Christians who are concerned over potentially high immigration levels, it fails to address a genuine sense of duty toward the commonweal that may be driving others to call for stricter immigration policies. Like any moral system, Aquinas' is neither perfect nor complete. Even so, his understanding of the relationship

between love and knowledge – which is evident in the order of charity – provides Christian leaders with a clearer sense of how the pull and push of love and justice may be at work in this context.

God created humankind to live and flourish in the context of family life and many kinds of friendships because divine and human love protects and provides. We en flesh our love for God and one another, even undocumented immigrants, within those relationships, for the sake of their needs and ours. For this reason, we owe our families the duty of providing for their material needs. We owe our fellow citizens the duty of seeking the common good together. We owe strangers the duty of providing relief and assistance whenever circumstances require (as is the case with refugees and asylum seekers).

St Thomas' insights into human nature suggest why Americans fall in love with and befriend undocumented immigrants. They also help to highlight the perilous situation that millions of mixed status families face in the United States. We tend to presume that undocumented immigrants are strangers who lead isolated lives, but the majority of them are husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, of US citizens and permanent residents. The immigration debate centers on the punishment that adult undocumented immigrants should suffer for breaking immigration law, including deportation. Yet the future looks bleak for a society that purposefully breaks apart millions of immigrant and mixed status families in the name of justice and fairness. Such a society will be unable to nourish – or be nourished by – a love that is rational, ordered, and just.

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CHAPTER 21

Theologizing Popular Catholicism

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Popular Catholicism is an expression of Catholicism that emerges from the needs, desires, and hopes of the Latino/a community. It arises from the community. Thus, the word “popular” denotes “of the people.” Latino theologian and primary scholar on Latino/a popular Catholicism Orlando Espín explains, “[it] is ‘popular’ not because it is widespread but because its creators and practitioners are the people, and more concretely, the marginalized people of society” (Espín 1997: 162). For Latino/as, popular Catholicism is important because it acts to affirm, unify, and inspire the community. The practices of popular Catholicism do not necessarily conform to Church parameters. Nor do they always adhere to the norms established by clergy. These devotions, identified as “unofficial” by the Church, persist and are carried out with great enthusiasm and as events separate from or sometimes parallel to “official” rituals or worship sanctioned by the Church. Nonetheless, for US Latino communities, popular Catholicism remains an active, dynamic, and celebrated expression of faith revealing the deeply held theological convictions of the people.

Popular Catholicism has roots that draw from varied sources. Some devotions have their origins in the religious piety of sixteenth-century European Catholicism. Other religious practices are vestiges melded from Amerindian and African indigenous beliefs. As Espín asserts, popular Catholicism is a rich place, a significant *locus theologicus* that is central to the study of the faith life of the people. It provides a source for theological reflection and is important for understanding Latino/a theology. Latino theologian and pastor Virgilio Elizondo claims that attention to the devotions and rituals that are carried out voluntarily by the people, from generation to generation and with or without the approval of the Church, suggests the ways in which God is encountered.¹

In this chapter the experience of popular Catholicism will be discussed through the lens of five topics: *Lugar/Place*, *Tradición/Tradition*, *Comunidad/Community*, *Sabiduría/*

Wisdom, and *Abundancia*/Abundance. These topics are drawn from the generative ideas and themes that emerge as important to the community and suggest the ways in which God is encountered and understood. Each topic begins with a discussion and ends with an example of popular Catholicism. To conclude, three issues of further exploration for popular Catholicism will be addressed. This brief summary is not comprehensive or exhaustive, but provides an introduction to popular Catholicism.

Lugar/Place

Numerous Latino theologians have noted the importance of *lugar* or “place” within popular Catholicism. The word has implications ranging from the abstract to the concrete. Orlando Espín acknowledges popular Catholicism as a *locus theologicus*, a “place” where faith is enacted, expressed, and made real. This “place” makes explicit the faith of a people through ritual and devotion revealing deeply held religious beliefs and theological understanding. Latina theologian Ada María Isasi-Díaz drew attention to *lo cotidiano*, the domestic places and spaces within everyday life where daily struggles are carried out and made “holy” (Isasi-Díaz 1993: 62–5). Virgilio Elizondo names the borderland as a “place” of “in-betweenness” and significant for theological reflection. Challenges endured by Latino/as take place in actual geographic locations such as the border or the barrio. However, places of socioeconomic hardships experienced by Latino immigrants extend to cities and rural communities throughout the United States. Popular Catholicism provides places where memory is safeguarded, tradition is celebrated, and identity is affirmed. Although “place” can be a contested sight, it is also a place of refuge. Whether abstract or concrete, public or private, for Latino/as the notion of place is a significant component of popular Catholicism.

For US Latino/as, “place” is vital, as it is where one is from. The diversity of expression of popular Catholicism among US Latino/as reflects the multiplicity of ethnic groups and the varied places from which they come: Cuba, Puerto Rico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Peru, Venezuela, Mexico, and so on. Their identities differ significantly as do their experiences, contexts, histories, and geographies. Nevertheless, despite the differences in ethnicity, varied degrees of assimilation, and their distinct origins, there appear recognizable elements when it comes to popular Catholicism. Like the Spanish language that unites differences among Latino/as, the lived faith practices, although varied among Latino ethnic groups, bear a “family” resemblance. The specific expressions are different but the purposes are fundamentally similar. An example can be found in the manifold devotions to the Virgin Mary.

The ubiquity of Marian devotion among US Latino/as has links to the numerous histories, apparitions, and legends that arose in connection with the Virgin throughout Central and Latin America during the centuries of European contact. Marian popular piety can be traced to its Iberian roots. William A. Christian, Jr, whose research focuses on Marian apparitions and devotion in Spain, uses the term “local” rather than “popular” to underscore the point that popular religions are tied to a specific place and

a historical constituency (Christian 1981). Thus, the particular places and various manifestations of the Virgin hold great importance for devotees throughout the Americas. Every country prides itself on its particular Virgin: Argentina – Our Lady of Luján; Dominican Republic – Our Lady of “La Altagracia”; Guatemala – Our Lady of the Rosary; Peru – Our Lady of Mercy; Mexico – Our Lady of Guadalupe (discussed in more detail later); Cuba – Our Lady of Charity, and so on.

Our Lady of Charity (her full name is *La Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre*), for example, is the patroness of Cuba and representative of Cuban national and racial identity both in Cuba and among Cubans in the United States.² Her feast day is September 8 and her following throughout the year illustrates the importance of place in popular Catholicism.

La Caridad’s apparition or discovery is similar to other apparition stories of the Virgin in that she made herself known to humble, unsuspecting persons. Moreover, her veneration became interwoven with the national identity, history, hopes, and ultimately the “place” for a community of Cuban exiles.

The first historical document of *La Caridad*’s discovery along the coast of Cuba is a 1687 narrative by an African slave, Juan Moreno, and two indigenous brothers, Rodrigo and Juan de Hoyos. The three were in a boat, gathering salt in the Bay of Nipe, when they came across a floating statue of Mary engraved with the words “Yo Soy La Virgen de la Caridad” (“I am the Virgin of Charity”). When they pulled her up onto the boat, her clothes were found to be miraculously dry. They returned to their village, built her an altar, and miracles began to be attributed to her. When the authorities tried to remove the Virgin from Juan Moreno’s slave community to a more “worthy” and prestigious place, she reappeared at her original altar, a place she designated significant. She remained a local devotion for slaves and ex-slaves until the latter half of the nineteenth century, when her devotion spread throughout Cuba. In 1916 she was named patroness of Cuba. With a slight alteration of the story, the three men in the boat came to be known as an African, Spaniard, and indigenous – the three races of the Americas – which held further import for the Cuban community.

La Caridad took on additional significance beginning in the 1960s when Cubans seeking political asylum fled their homeland to the United States. A 16-inch replica of *La Caridad* was smuggled out of Cuba in 1961 and into the United States. The celebrated statue was enshrined in a specially built site, called *La Ermita*, on Biscayne Bay, Florida. Other images and figurines of *La Caridad* and her ascribed devotions were transported wherever new communities of Cubans were formed. For many Cubans who left their home country and found it necessary to build new lives in new places, *La Caridad* and her related devotions continue to be a symbol of “place.”

Tradición/Tradition

Popular Catholicism draws upon the canonical teachings of the Church (Tradition) and is interpreted through the lens of the heritage and local traditions of the people. Thus, Latino/as experience with history and memory, local culture and environment, folk

literature, art and music, and social and political realities become sources for popular Catholicism. These elements, many of them related to indigenous and African roots, become imaginatively and creatively blended. Orlando Espín notes how popular Catholicism integrates “official” doctrine with “unofficial” practices. Boundaries between the two are porous and the intermingling often results in a fresh dynamism. Rather than a monolithic or static understanding of faith, theological concepts are brought to life in extraordinary ways. Notions of God, Christ, and the Trinity, as well as suffering, salvation, and redemption, are made explicit in visceral ways through lifelike sculptures, public re-enactments, and home-based rituals. In these ways popular Catholicism acts to reinforce the precepts of the faith, giving emphasis to lived traditions that are meaningful to the community.

Popular Catholicism, as Espín notes (1997: 70–1), displays the medieval predilection for the visual, the oral, and the dramatic. This insight underscores the character and spirit of the Catholic faith that was introduced to the Americas prior to the Council of Trent (1545–63). Evangelization efforts beginning as early as the fifteenth century included the transmission of traditions, practices, devotions, and rituals important to the Iberian missionaries. The precepts of the faith were disseminated and reinforced through visual imagery, oral culture, and religious drama – catechetical tools commonly used in the era. These embodied methods of instruction were transmitted and received by the indigenous peoples of the Americas. Some Christian stories and beliefs resonated with indigenous worldviews. Other narratives and theological concepts were visually recast by native artists who employed symbols recognizable to the indigenous people. Local lay indigenous leadership was critical to the task of evangelization. Their expertise in culture, local traditions, and language was invaluable in inculturating the faith.

It was only after the Reformation, when Tridentine directives began to permeate the European continent, that local traditions were challenged by the imposition of canonical Tradition. Doctrinal knowledge was emphasized over experience and affect, and lay participation gave way to clerical leadership. As a result, the various expressive traditions and “unofficial” devotions that held meaning to local church communities diminished or were prohibited outright. This shift in emphasis made its way forcefully across the Iberian Peninsula and over to the Americas. The Inquisition both on the European continent and in the New World acted to assure accountability, uniformity, and adherence to the official Church. Consequently, as the Catholic Church became focused on doctrinal compliance and hierarchy, the people’s alternative was to retreat into their religious worlds. Many carried out their local religious traditions and devotions clandestinely. Some traditions that drew from a syncretic mix of pre-colonial beliefs, African-influenced religious practices, and rural and popular folkways were transformed into alternative faith expressions such as *Curanderismo*, *Santería*, *Espiritismo*, and *Candomblé*.³

Popular Catholicism endures. Many of its devotions are rooted in the local traditions of Iberia, practiced and transformed in Latin America, and continued by US Latino/as. Examples of this trajectory are the *Semana Santa* (Holy Week) processions that were carried out in villages and towns throughout medieval Spain. They included life-sized sculptures, many of them wrought of wood and made by master craftsmen.

Today these treasured effigies of Christ in the Garden, Christ carrying the cross, Christ crucified, and his mother depicted as *La Dolorosa* (the Sorrowful Mother) continue to tell the story of the Passion. Each night during Holy Week they are removed from their stationary location within the church, placed on elaborate *andas* (platforms), and carried by members of *cofradías* (confraternities of religious devotees). They are processed out of the church into the surrounding streets and then back to the church. These Holy Week practices continue to be enacted in Spain and in rural communities and cities throughout Latin America.

Another expression of this devotion that holds great significance for Latino/as is the *Via Crucis* (the Way of Cross). This example of popular Catholicism illustrates the dynamic interplay between Tradition and tradition. For many Latino/as, prominence seems to be placed on the cross of Good Friday rather than the resurrection on Easter. Latino/a theologians suggest that the attention paid to the events of Good Friday places emphasis on Christ's humanity. The theological insight revealed here is that it is through his suffering that individuals within the community intimately and collectively understand the experience of accompanying Christ to the cross.⁴

The *Via Crucis* is a public and communal re-enactment that takes place on Good Friday. For all Catholics, the Triduum is central to the faith because it celebrates the paschal mystery by which the world has been transformed by Christ's death and resurrection. The three days which begin on Maundy Thursday and extend to Easter Eve commemorate the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ.

On Good Friday, the re-enactment begins outside the church and includes a cast of selected members from the parish. The larger community acts as onlookers who accompany Jesus as he carries his cross, wending his way through the neighborhood streets. Participants stop along the way to listen and to witness each incident of the Passion as it is recounted. The community physically and emotionally participates in the unfolding events that lead to the crucifixion. They walk in solidarity with the suffering and crucified Christ. Once returned to the church, participants manifest their devotion to Christ and their own sorrow through prayer, by touching his cross, and kissing the effigy of his body. They then wait in prayerful anticipation for his victory over death – the resurrection. Roberto Goizueta notes, "Jesus, who comes alive in popular Catholicism is not an abstraction or a 'mere' symbol. Rather he is a particular, concrete, historical person, with flesh and bones, a body, and a face which reveals the universal, spiritual Christ of faith – and he is made concrete in the performative, ritual act of 'walking with'" (Goizueta 1995: 69). Practices such as the *Via Crucis* uphold the abiding Tradition of the Church, but are expressed and understood through the meaningful traditions of the people.

Comunidad / Community

For Latino/as, the experiences of popular Catholicism take place within the community, are enacted by the community, and are carried out for the community. Popular Catholicism is not an isolated event. It functions to unite the community and strengthen

relationships among its members. Unlike the emphasis on individualism and independence so predominant in mainstream culture, popular Catholicism reinforces interdependence and the bonds of the community. "Popular Catholicism," theologian Roberto Goizueta notes, "underscores a theological anthropology that emphasizes 'nosotros'" – the "we."⁵ It is within the community that the self is born, lives, and dies. Attesting to this understanding of the relational character of Latino/a faith are the ways that familiar sacramental celebrations, such as baptisms, communions, weddings, and funerals, draw together large gatherings of extended family. An example of another rite of passage unique to Latino/as is the *quinceañera*. This event marks a young Latina's coming of age at her fifteenth year. It involves a mass or special blessing and a party that includes her family, relatives, and significant friends. As one matures, circles of community support grow. *El Día de los Muertos* (the Day of the Dead), an annual festival held in November that commemorates the deceased with elaborate altars, is an example of popular Catholicism that reinforces and celebrates communal ties between the living and the dead. Community is always understood in the broadest sense of the word and as inclusive of "familial" connections: extended and close; kin or clan; living and dead. The sacrality of life and death and its transitions are encountered in sacraments, special events, and relationships celebrated by the community.⁶

As Virgilio Elizondo notes, popular Catholicism expressed through an ensemble of rituals, ceremonies, devotions, and prayers is a key factor that shapes the identity and internal cohesion of Latino communities (Elizondo 1986: 36). *Las Posadas* is one such tradition within popular Catholicism that illustrates how community identity is reinforced. *Las Posadas* takes place nightly nine days prior to Christmas and is a re-enactment of Luke's verse (Luke 2:7) that portrays Mary and Joseph seeking lodging for the night. *Las Posadas* is an event that unfolds outdoors and often takes place in the neighborhood surrounding the church. Joseph and Mary, a donkey if available, a company of angels, musicians, and a gathering of community members of all ages accompany the couple as they look for a room for the night. The group proceeds in pilgrimage fashion singing songs on the journey and making three stops at three designated homes along the way. Despite Mary's visible pregnancy and the couple's need for shelter, they are turned away. At each stop (home), a selected person from the group steps forward to reflect on the *Posada* experience and the related needs that exist in our world today among immigrants, refugees, the homeless, or those in desperate situations. The evening concludes with the holy couple and their entourage arriving at their destination (the church hall or a designated home) where they are indeed welcomed and greeted with warm hospitality. The community celebration begins with hot chocolate and *pan dulce* (sweet bread), and concludes with a piñata for the children to break.⁷

Las Posadas is an example of popular Catholicism that can be appreciated on numerous levels. It is a communal experience that is intergenerational. Children and teens are drawn into *Las Posadas* to take on the roles of Mary, Joseph, and the angels. Particular emphasis is placed on the participation of children so that they are made aware of *nuestras tradiciones* (our heritage). Musicians of all ages provide the accompaniment necessary for "pilgrims on a journey." Designated leaders of the community deliver the narration or the

reflections at each stop. Food and drink are prepared and piñata-breaking organized. Every member of the community is invited to journey with Mary and Joseph.

On another level, *Las Posadas* relays the story of migration and rejection, an experience many Latino/as know all too well. Mary and Joseph attempt to find shelter at a particularly critical moment in their lives. This task epitomizes the everyday ethical-political and economic struggle for survival experienced by many in the community. Just as the intrinsic worth of individuals such as Mary and Joseph is called into question, participants reflect on the ways the dominant culture systematically acts to marginalize them (Goizueta 1995: 129). The story resonates with the community and underscores the *realidad* (reality) of their own experiences.

Lastly, for Latino/as, often invisible to the larger community, a procession carried out in public positions them in the light. Momentarily their obscurity and minority status are displaced (Dávalos 2002). The procession through the neighborhood becomes testimony of the Latino community's presence and an assertion of their place within the larger society. The community gathers to remember and celebrate an event which in turn animates deeply held beliefs about who they are as a people.

Thus, *Las Posadas* reverberates at various levels. Its intergenerational focus serves to perpetuate the traditions and heritage important to the community. The biblical story is reinterpreted and made relevant for the everyday experiences encountered by the community. Its public character reinforces group identity and community. Popular Catholicism such as *Las Posadas* fosters the identity and internal cohesion of Latino communities. The theological message of *Las Posadas* demonstrates that Christian eschatological hope is not about isolated individuals striving to save their individual souls, but rather about a community that, even under hostile conditions, is able to welcome God in their midst, represented by their joyful *conviviendo*, living together.

Sabiduría/Wisdom

The experience of popular Catholicism seeps into the lifeblood of the community. The rituals enliven the senses and engage the body. Its symbols are interactive and multifaceted. The stories invigorate memories and place emphasis on the central narratives of faith. Participants in *Las Posadas* are present with Mary and Joseph on the eve of the incarnational event. The community walks the paschal mystery with Christ on the *Via Crucis*. They kneel before the Virgin, touch the crucifix, and light candles for the needs of loved ones. It is a way to think, remember, and pray with feelings and with bodies. It is embodied knowing.

The rituals, symbols, and narratives of popular Catholicism disclose what is important to the community. Ritual practices shed light on beliefs and shape ethical expectations. Orlando Espín suggests that popular Catholicism be viewed as an "epistemological network" that communicates beliefs about God and the sacred, reveals the manner in which one is to live life, and supports the use of rites and rituals "to discover deeper and more humanizing levels of social and familial relationship" (Espín 1997: 163). Thus,

knowing and understanding are enacted in the experience of living faith. Jeanette Rodriguez further notes that the word “experience” has a nuanced understanding in Spanish. *Experiencia* is understood as “living and reflecting upon reality.” Latino/as gain *experiencia* as they live and reflect upon their lives and contextual reality. *Sabiduría* (wisdom) is the result of *experiencia*. Consequently, most Latino/as consider that one gains fuller and deeper *experiencia* with age. Thus, the collective wisdom of the elderly, particularly the women of the community, is especially valued.

Older Latina women are esteemed for their *experiencia*, since they have frequently endured numerous hardships and reflected upon reality more than others (Rodriguez 1994: 61–2; 1993). They are often the *rezadores* (prayers) of the community, responsible for carrying out the devotions, and as wisdom figures accountable for passing on the traditions. “Women are the center and pillars of the families,” Orlando Espín explains, “and Latino popular Catholicism is definitely women-empathic. It is not exaggeration to say that older women are our people’s cultural and religious hermeneuts. They are the ministers and bearers of our identity” (Espín 1997: 4). They are the guardians of the faith and the custodians of its meaningful symbols. How symbols are manifested, circulated, and transmitted provides insight into how the community engages with and understands the world. Within popular Catholicism, symbols act to foster *experiencia* with God and the sacred. As avenues for encountering the divine they are wisdom’s ways of knowing.

The Virgin of Guadalupe is an example of a symbol that holds great meaning for Mexicans in particular and Latinos in general. The narrative portrays how God acts in the world and relates to humanity. Through Mary, an encounter between humanity and the divine is mediated. The story discloses a theology of God, not as an imperious figure, but as one who is compassionate. God cares for those overlooked, attends to those who suffer, and advocates for those treated unjustly. Thus, Guadalupe and her story is a central symbol to the community.

The story of the apparition of the Virgin to Juan Diego a newly Christianized indigenous person, takes place on the hill of Tepeyac outside the capital city of Mexico in December of 1531.⁸ She identifies herself to Juan Diego as the Mother of God and asks him to request from the bishop that a shrine be built in her honor on the site of her apparition. Juan Diego protests, claiming he is unworthy to carry out this important task. His objections reflect his self-perception and status as a member of a demoralized native population at a time of Spanish colonial subjugation. However, in an excerpt from the *Nican Mophua*, a seventeenth-century text, which relays what were said to be the Virgin’s words to Juan Diego, protection and hope are compassionately conveyed.

Listen and hear well in your heart, my most abandoned son: that which scares you and troubles you is nothing; do not let your countenance and heart be troubled; do not fear that sickness or any other sickness or anxiety. Am I not here, your mother? Are you not under my shadow and my protection? Am I not your source of life? Are you not in the hollow of my mantle where I cross my arms? What else do you need? Let nothing trouble you or cause you sorrow.⁹

This passage provided great comfort to an oppressed people then and holds relevance today for a Latino/a population that continues to deal with challenges related to discrimination, immigration, and economic hardships.

As the story progresses, the Virgin provides a miraculous sign before the bishop as proof of her apparition and her desires. Roses fall from Juan Diego's cloak and her image appears on his *tilma*. With this evidence, the bishop concedes his belief and grants the Virgin's wish. This particular image of the Virgin hangs today in the Basilica of Guadalupe in Mexico City.

Guadalupe's image is compelling. Her figure is drawn from iconography of the Immaculate Conception and references the sources of the Virgin of the Apocalypse described in Revelation 12:1. However, most notable are the unique hybrid symbols understood by an indigenous audience reflecting her alliance with a *mestizo* race.¹⁰

The Virgin's face has been described as dusk-colored or brown. For an indigenous and *mestizo* population this color was particularly important because she was like them – *moreno* (dark-skinned). She stands before a mandorla of light representing the sun. For the Mesoamericans, the sun was a major god. Thus, the Virgin is greater than the sun, but does not block or extinguish the sun. As in images of the Immaculate Conception, the Virgin stands on the moon; however, in a Mesoamerican world, the Virgin's stance on the moon signifies her status of importance. Her *cinta* (belt), commonly worn by women, is tied above her waist, indicating pregnancy. An angel situated below the Virgin holds up the hem of her garment, a turquoise mantle. Angels held important roles as intermediaries between the heavens and earth in a Mesoamerican world. Guadalupe symbols tacitly and explicitly affirm a special relationship between the human and the divine.

Of all the narratives in popular Catholicism, the story of the Virgin of Guadalupe discloses God's compassion and solidarity with the oppressed and symbolizes God's maternal affirmation and protection of the weakest. Her devotees venerate her with affection and turn to her time and again in petition and gratitude. Her appeal draws together diverse cultures, ages, genders, and classes, crossing ethnic and national borders. In 1999 John Paul II named her patroness of the Americas. For Latino/a communities, she remains a central symbol and wisdom figure.

Abundancia/Abundance

Wherever popular Catholicism is carried out, the senses are fully engaged. Practices incorporate a plethora of stimuli. This may include the sounds of lively music, the reverberation of litanies prayed in unison, and the scent of flowers, candles, or warming food. Devotees may be visually roused by lifelike statues or moved by the stories of healing or photographs of loved ones affixed to the hem of a saint's garment. Experiences may take place in the heat of the day or the chill of night. Participants find themselves standing for long hours within a crowded church or within the restrained confines of a small living room.

Roberto Goizueta suggests that this intensity underscores the aesthetic dimension of popular Catholicism. Time, space, action, and participants fluidly merge into the beauty of the moment and the realm of the sacred. Drawing on the work of José Vasconcelos (1882–1959), Goizueta names this “empathic fusion,” wherein the person, or subject, loses himself or herself in the experience of beauty. This beauty is significant because it reflects the unique character of popular Catholicism, which blends together aesthetic and cultural elements in a dynamic way. Notably, the symbols and rituals of US Latino/ a popular Catholicism reflect an aesthetic or empathic fusion of European, indigenous and African elements. This *mestizaje* is expressed in “the symbols and rituals of popular religion [which] are prime examples of the intrinsic value of beauty, and, hence, the intrinsic value of human life as beautiful, i.e., as an end in itself for the goal of the community’s participation in the stories, symbols, and rituals of popular religion is nothing other than that participation itself” (Goizueta 1995: 102).¹¹

This vitality and richness, so prominently demonstrated in popular Catholicism, are found in the experience of abundance one encounters in the extravagant public displays and ornate places where devotions are enacted. This profusion is also noted in practices of popular Catholicism carried out within the private spaces of the home. Home altars and their related devotions best exemplify this phenomenon.

Usually arranged by the matriarch of the family, home altars comprise an assemblage of objects precious to the family. Altars may be located on the fireplace mantel in the living room, situated on a corner table in the dining room, or discreetly placed in the bedroom. A statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe or another Marian image meaningful to the family might stand on a hand-crocheted or embroidered *carpetita* (table cover) amidst the photographs of family members and other relatives. Fresh or imitation flowers in elaborate vases may be positioned next to prayer cards of Jesus and statues of favorite saints, such as Jude Thaddeus or Martin de Porres. Additional saints may be added as *promesas* (promises) are carried out, and removed once the requests of those praying are satisfied. The collection, often a densely assembled grouping, represents what is most valued and meaningful to the family.

The altars reflect the aesthetic of relationship, which expands, contracts, and is replenished as needed. Photographs and remembrances of family members, living and dead, are assembled side by side with images or figurines of well-loved saints. They are situated as if in relationship or in conversation with one another, positioned to act as divine allies between two distinct realities (Turner 1999: 97, 100).

The altars display the women’s conviction that relationships are as significant as they are extensive. Each object holds a story or a memory. Together the objects comprise multiple family stories and simultaneous cultural memories. This accumulation and abundance evidenced by these altars suggest multiple meanings and evoke interrelated connections between the objects on the altar. Latina theologian Jeanette Rodriguez explains how these practices act in vital ways to help women understand the events in their lives: “The way these women come to make meaning of their world, or their overall assumptive world, is powerful and has at its core what I term complex relationality. Complex relationality refers to the way in which women’s experience is grounded in

interpersonal relations and extends itself even into the realm of divinity" (Rodriguez 1994: 115). These relationships are reflected in the altars and in the communal or personal devotions carried out by the women of the family. Moreover, the altars within the home affirm domestic space as sacred. They, like other aspects of popular Catholicism, transgress designated boundaries. Spiritual practices take place in private as well as public space.

Latina theologian Ada María Isasi-Díaz directed attention to *lo cotidiano*, this place where the everyday realities and experiences and the generative words and actions of ordinary people serve as an important source of insight. It is in the lived experiences and the daily struggles that theological claims become tangibly known and understood. Similarly, Jeanette Rodriguez points out that

theology done by women deals with concrete experiences. Daily life is the point of departure. For Latinas a religious view of faith as mediated through culture has played a primary role in their lives. Through their faith as lived out in their spirituality, they discover a source by which to recognize significant values that they draw from for developing self esteem, confidence and a commitment to resist all forms of sustained injustices. (Rodriguez 2002: 115).

Home altars, like other expressions of popular Catholicism, embody this spirituality.

Questions and Challenges

The study of popular Catholicism remains an important source for examining the theological underpinnings of Latino/as faith practices and beliefs. However, theologians, pastoral leaders, and the participants themselves are not oblivious to the issues that emerge over popular Catholicism. Three of these will be briefly addressed here.

First, questions continue to be posed over issues of power, authority, and ownership. For those who participate in various practices of popular Catholicism, conflicts often arise over who "owns" the devotion or how rituals are to be appropriately or "accurately" carried out (Pecklers 1998). Emphasis placed on these particulars often misdirects or overrides the purpose of the ritual or practice. The community loses sight of not only the substance or essence of the devotion, but also its spirit. Outside the parameters of the Church, saints and virgins are being

co-opted and used by gangs and drug cartels. Again, power, authority, and ownership come into play, but with these increasing cases, the primary meaning of the symbols and their fundamental sacrality are abused.

Second, the practices and devotions of popular Catholicism as described here have been explained from a Latino/a context. However, popular Catholicism is not a phenomenon unique to Latino/as. The distinct practices and devotions of other ethnic and immigrant groups inspired by their own unique traditions are noted in the ubiquity and diversity of church shrines and side altars devoted to particular saints and virgins.

The devotions and rituals held sacred by the various ethnic communities are reflected in the events and celebrations of the parish. They reveal the diversity of faith expressions, but at the same time compete for limited space, time, and resources within the life of the parish. As various populations assert their presence within the Catholic Church, conflicting tensions will have to be held in check. How will communities deal with this diversity?

A third and final issue is related to the balance between local practices and the universal Church. Popular Catholicism is significant to the particular communities of faith, but the essence of Catholicism resides in its sacramental life. How does popular Catholicism align with or detract from the key tenets of the Catholic faith?¹² Given its vitality, what potential does popular Catholicism have to contribute to the life and future of the Catholic Church? These are three issues and related questions that continue to challenge popular Catholicism.

Notes

- 1 Virgilio Elizondo writes about the experience of God encountered within the Latino community through popular Catholicism. See, for example, Elizondo (200a, 2000b).
- 2 For more on *La Caridad* see Tweed (1997).
- 3 For more, see De La Torre and Aponte (2001: 124–35).
- 4 For more on the *Via Crucis* see Goizueta (1995: 32–7).
- 5 See “Nosotros: Community as the Birthplace of Self” in Goizueta (1995: 47–76).
- 6 For more on the sacramentality of popular Catholicism see Empereur and Fernandez (2006).
- 7 Ana Maria Pineda, RSM, discusses *Las Posadas* in Pineda (1997:29–42).
- 8 For more on the Virgin of Guadalupe see Elizondo (1997); Brading (2001); Elizondo, Deck, and Matovina (2006); and Poole (1995).
- 9 From “The Text of the *Nican Mopohua*,” in Elizondo (1997: 14–16).
- 10 For more on the iconography and the meanings of the indigenous and European overlays of the Virgin of Guadalupe see Burkhart (1997) 198–227 and Rodriguez (1994: 22–30).
- 11 For more on the aesthetics of popular Catholicism see Garcia-Rivera (1999).
- 12 For a discussion of the issues related to the strengths and weaknesses of directives related to popular Catholicism and liturgy see Phan (2002).

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CHAPTER 22

Theologizing Popular Protestantism

Edwin David Aponte

Any discussion about theologizing popular Latino/a Protestantism should address the nature and expressions of popular Protestant religion, and one way to better understand popular religion is to view it more broadly as popular spirituality. That in turn prompts the question as to what is meant by spirituality and the related concept of popular spirituality. Despite talk about a wall of separation between church and state or the division between the sacred and the secular, the population of the United States in its expressions and practices is much more religious and spiritual than is perceived. On the one hand, some people question the continuing relevance of any spirituality or religious convictions and are convinced that talk of spirituality and religion is a waste of time whether it is popular or official. On the other hand, various types of religion, religious practices, and spiritual beliefs and practices can be found across the cultural landscape as people speak about spirituality, higher life, empowerment, transcendence, life balance, peace, mindfulness, and deeper meaning, not only in connection to the ultimate, but also in daily life.

Within the context of the United States, national traumas repeatedly show that the allegedly rigid divisions between public and private, “spiritual” and “secular,” are shattered through situational communal spiritual responses, whether it be to the bombing of a federal building in Oklahoma, the national response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, or the senseless killing of young children in an elementary school in suburban Connecticut. In addition to the situational engagement with spirituality in times of national distress, there are those Christians who not only talk about spirituality, but also claim that the United States is a Christian nation. Whether as a communal public response to crisis, the defense of a notion of national identity, or an everyday

private quest, people in the US pursue varieties of spirituality as they seek meaning, comfort, healing, answers, resolution, community, mystical experience, or wholeness.

Anita de Luna gives one of the most straightforward and useful definitions of spirituality when she says that it refers “to those religious experiences and practices that draw us outside ourselves to the transcendent” (de Luna 2006: 106). In a similar vein, William Reiser describes spirituality as anything that has to do with “the interior life” and “is concerned with the development of the human potential for God. That development entails the purification and growth of human freedom, and the highest exercise or expression of that freedom is love” (Reiser 2007: 1318). Sandra Schneiders describes spirituality as an existential phenomenon that is “a conscious and deliberate way of living” (2011: 16). Like many others theologians, Michael Downey recognizes that there are many understandings regarding the nature of spirituality; nevertheless he perceives that there are two common features in the various contemporary definitions: first that spirituality asserts that there is more to existence than the visible and the material; and second, and flowing from the prior assumption, that there is more to life than what can be apprehended physically. Therefore Downey argues that people see spirituality as “a quest for a personal integration in the face of forces of fragmentation and depersonalization” (Downey 1997: 14). Philosopher Owen Flanagan, in a non-theistic way, draws on Buddhism and seeks to reconcile the findings of scientific inquiry with the search for meaningful and fulfilled lives so that “respectful and profitable dialogue between science and spirituality can proceed” (Flanagan 2007: 64). Therefore, spirituality can be understood as encompassing all of life, as both individual and communal, as having as one its goals to connect people to something beyond themselves, and as encouraging practices leading to integration, growth, and expressions of freedom and love.

Spiritual explorations and practices of spirituality from people of all types of religious convictions, or even those with no formal religious convictions, are widespread across the nation. Leigh Eric Schmidt describes this as “the American preoccupation with spirituality” (Schmidt 2005: 23). Sociologist Robert Wuthnow adds that in the United States the concept of spirituality is “the shorthand term we use in our society to talk about a person’s relationship with God” (Wuthnow 2007: 112), but as Flanagan points out, there are people without theistic convictions who are interested in spirituality. Scholar of religion Robert Orsi observes that in popular culture in the United States the distinction made between being “spiritual” and not being “religious” really points toward a value judgment between “good religion” and “bad religion,” in which that which is perceived as good or true is called spirituality (Orsi 2005: 187–8), whereas sociologist Peter Holmes defines spirituality “as the human search for meaning, particularly relationally ... for many today this incorporates a supernatural/corporeal dimension that suggests many of us have discovered we are more than our physical biology” (Holmes 2007: 24–5).

Spirituality may show up in traditional settings such as Bible studies and prayer meetings, but also in literature reading groups that are not overtly religious. Spirituality

is found in Taizé services in “Mainline” Protestant congregations, retreats, encounter groups, liturgical renewal organizations, holistic exercise sessions, and a variety of religious services. Books, CDs, DVDs, and websites address spirituality, faith, and all types of mysticism, meditation, prayer and devotional disciplines, monastic chants, psychic insight, Asian religions and philosophies, and many other options. From one perspective, the rise of the so-called new atheism can be seen as an expression of a type of anti-spiritualism that is still concerned with moral behavior in the world (Dawkins 2008; Dennett 2006; Harris 2004; Hitchens 2007; Stenger 2007). This reflects a type of spiritual or existential emptiness that is searching for something to fill a void. When combined with the growing literature and number of films on the supernatural, apocalyptic and end-times prophecies, predictions, and interpretations, the breadth of the interest in spirituality and things religious becomes even more striking.

Within this context, many people in the United States rely on some kind of spirituality that makes sense in their everyday lives, whether it is Protestant seminarians exploring the unfamiliar ground of *lectio divina*, spiritual formation, and direction for the first time; or Roman Catholic lay people attending weekend retreats; or individuals eclectically adopting the meditative practices of Buddhism; or seekers exploring the abundance of so-called New Age alternative spirituality. Many concurrently participate in several types of spiritual and religious activities on a regular basis and see no essential contradiction in doing so, no matter how disparate the philosophical or theological foundations might appear to be, ranging from a turning to new traditions to a new appreciation of received traditions in ways that may not be deemed conventionally religious (Epperly 2011; Myers 2000).

Increasingly, the pursuit and practice of spirituality are not solely the concern of isolated ascetics, or monks and nuns, or small religious communities on the periphery of the cultural mainstreams, but are a widespread concern for people found in all walks and stations of life (Locklin 2005: 2–4; Fuller 2001; Schmidt 2005). The variety and breadth of the spiritual inquiry, thought, and practice in the United States are as striking as is the assortment of the searchers, seekers, and committed adherents to alternative spiritualities. It is becoming more and more common for people who claim that they are “not religious” to begin a quest for spirituality or “soul.” This may reveal itself in some type of connection with ultimate reality, the wider universe, or perhaps both, that will provide meaning, guidance, and a source of sustenance for everyday life. Some people in their exploration may move from a received tradition and embrace what for them is a new approach, even if the approach itself has a very long history.

Many explanations are put forward to account for this interest in spirituality. Suggestions include people’s experience of a “spiritual poverty,” a problem of belief, spiritual crisis, obsession with material aspects of life, a spiritual malaise (especially among youth), an awareness of the deficiency of individualism, an estrangement from spiritual values, a need to affirm the preciousness of human life and the call to a higher purpose, feelings of alienation and spiritual yearnings in popular culture, and a loss of a sense of certainties and an experience of the transcendental (Myers 2000: 258–60).

While helpful from one perspective, these observations do not fully address the complex intersection between religion, access to economic opportunity, the realities of racism, sexism, homophobia, and power, all of which may be a factor in popular spirituality and how people make sense of the world.

For example, exploring through the lens of economic realities the profusion and expansion of spiritual alternatives in recent decades confirms the fact that for those who experienced material prosperity, it has failed to provide many with the feeling of personal fulfillment. For others, the economic hardships following the so-called Great Recession of 2008 provide an impetus to search for a helpful spirituality; while for still others, their economic situation was always difficult and became more so, and it was their spirituality that helped sustain them through hard times. If participation in conventional expressions of Judaism, Roman Catholicism, and “Mainline” Protestant denominations is the only indicator of spirituality, then the interest in religion did indeed crash at the end of the twentieth century, judging from membership of these denominations. But a narrative of decline in one setting is defied by growth in a diversity of religious and spiritual expressions outside the religious “mainline.” Pentecostal churches have flourished along with Islamic mosques, Hindu temples, and the sale of “religious” publications. Popular spirituality persists and is growing.

Participants in this spiritual explosion seem to come from across the entire cultural landscape in pluralistic America, and yet that diversity is barely considered in many discussions of the spiritual panorama of the United States. Some of the denominations experienced new growth and vitality due to the influx of recent immigrant groups, especially from Latin America. There are many who have not participated in the material prosperity experienced by the 1 percent (Rieger and Kwok 2012) and whose resources of spirituality have helped them cope with their minoritized positions within the dominant society. The intersection of personal wealth and religious interest is seen to be much more complicated when race and ethnicity are recognized as part of the mix. Responses to a need for the spiritual and the sacred are not the same across the board. In a word, while interest in spirituality is on the rise, there appears to be no limit to its definition and its practice.

With the growing interest in the practice and definition of spirituality as compared to institutionalized religion, sociologist Robert Wuthnow noted a shift in the United States from a “dwelling” type of spirituality to a “seeking” spirituality, which displays what he described as a “profound confusion about how best to practice spirituality,” and noted that “Americans are not simply people of faith who need to get religion back into the public life of their country; they are often confused individuals who are interested in spirituality but are unable to let organized religion solve all their problems and who therefore must work hard to figure out their own lives” (Wuthnow 1998: 11). Wuthnow’s definition assumes that public religion was absent from the public life of the nation, whereas it can be argued that it was never absent, although some versions of organized religion have lost their place of cultural pre-eminence.

Straightforward definitions of spirituality are further complicated when generational differences are identified in both dwelling and seeking types of spirituality.

Additionally, spirituality needs to be considered in a way that accounts for racial and ethnic realities, a perspective often overlooked in many studies of spirituality (Nanko-Fernández 2010: 21). Whether overlooked or not in a larger cultural context of spirituality as the pursuit of meaning, Latinas and Latinos also participate in this effort to practice spirituality that draws upon multiple sources and makes sense in *lo cotidiano*, in their daily lives. In reflecting on another US racial/ethnic group, Flora Wilson Bridges observes that African Americans do not “confine spirituality to religion, a building, or an institution. African-American religion and African-American spirituality are not identical, though the latter includes the former; African-American spirituality permeates all of black culture” (Bridges 2001: 3). In like manner, Latina/o spirituality is much broader than institutional religion (although it does not necessarily exclude it) and ought to be understood on its own terms.

If Ronald Rolheiser is correct when he asserts that actions are shaped by spirituality (1999), then that is all the more reason to emphasize the lived religion/spirituality of *lo cotidiano*. Latino/a peoples in their daily lives seek to interact with the divine or the transcendent, in a way that impacts action in daily life. Spirituality is the relationship that exists and is experienced, reflected upon, and cultivated for self-knowledge, identity formation, insight about others, creation of community, wisdom for living in the world, and answers to the big questions in life (Howard 2008: 16). It is at the level of popular religion or religiosity and spirituality that there is the greatest access to the many varieties of Latina/o spirituality (Aponte 2012).

Part of this multifaceted cultural milieu is that there also are numerous expressions of Latino/a spirituality. With so many different concepts and expressions of spirituality in many types of Latino/a contexts, is it possible to identify any common characteristics? As we consider expressions of Latina/o Protestant popular religion as spirituality and its impact on theology, is it even appropriate to speak of a common, shared Latino/a spirituality when there are so many different definitions of spirituality? Moreover, is it legitimate to speak of a single Latino/a population, since there are demographic variables, ethnic and regional distinctions, generational differences, and the important effects of culture and context? Therefore, is it possible to speak of a common Latino/a spirituality without falling into some sort of essentialism?

Spirituality is best understood through its impact on real life and its influence on informed practices. This, in turn, provides insight into the philosophical, theological, and lived dimensions of spirituality. So a key to answering the question about the existence of a common, shared Latino/a popular religion as spirituality might be found in the many expressions of popular religion. The concept of popular religion has been widely explored, and usually refers to lived religion at an everyday, grassroots level, and the location for doing theological reflection (Goizueta 1995: 19). Popular religion also is seen as part of a “dynamic process of creating and maintaining personal worlds of meaning and the interconnectedness of the religiosity of a people within a given society” (Lippy 1994: 10).

Popular religion is the everyday religion and spirituality of ordinary people who believe and act upon it. Furthermore, popular religion may be practiced in formal or

informal settings, in homes or in a church or other religious and/or spiritual settings. Popular religion as spirituality may be expressed in non-religious settings. While Peter Williams asserts that popular religion is usually found outside ecclesiastical structures, conveyed by and focused on tangible demonstrations of the “supernatural in the midst of the secular world” (Williams 1989: xi), Latino/a popular religion and spirituality have such grassroots power that in many cases they have overwhelmed official church structures, so that what is popular is now recognized concurrently as official, demonstrating again that any sacred/secular division represents a particular cultural perspective. Part of this is a different perspective on what has been called a sacred/profane division by North Atlantic cultures. Jeanette Rodriguez-Holguín notes that historian of religions Mircea Eliade emphasized a distinction between the sacred and the profane, but nevertheless made allowances for religious communities that took a more holistic approach, and did not see vast divides between the holy and the everyday in “archaic religious systems” (Rodriguez-Holguín 1990: 42). This approach of Eliade, Rodriguez-Holguín, and others displays a particular cultural bias and a value system of pegging religious and spiritual expressions on a scale of archaic and less archaic. Latino/a cultural systems resist such facile valuation, and the absence of a sharp sacred/profane distinction is not the exception in Latino/a popular religion and spirituality. Particular expressions of Latino/a popular spirituality may look “archaic” or exotic to some, but such an evaluation raises the shadow of a type of patronizing orientalism toward popular expressions of religion and spirituality (Said 1994). Latino/a Protestant popular religion and spirituality do not display a strict sacred/secular divide, nor would they relegate anything as “archaic” if it provides help and vibrancy to daily life, *lo cotidiano*.

Latino/a Catholic popular religion may include devotional relationship with the Virgin Mary and the saints and the use of household altars. It may embody the influence of indigenous religious beliefs, and both the modification of existing forms of devotion and worship and the creation of new ones. Anthropologist and theologian Harold Recinos describes popular as “a defining characteristic of a social class which has common identity, based upon a situation of inequality” (Recinos 2001: 116). Theologian Orlando Espín, speaking about popular Christianity in general and specifically about popular Catholicism and its connection to the relational networks of *lo cotidiano*, observes that it “embodies and epistemologically organizes these daily relationships and symbolically expresses their connections to/with the broader social networks—including the ‘sacred’ networks—through the rites, beliefs, objects, and experiences of the people’s religion” (Espín 2006: 6). Latina/o religiosity and spirituality are that daily mix of practices, beliefs, rituals small and large in diverse contexts, that point to an abiding and overarching sense of compelling impulse and desire.

Members of Latino/a communities experience a sense of spirituality and participate in the shared human search for relational meaning that encompasses something beyond the material. There are many senses of spirituality, some with things in common, some in opposition, sometimes both operating together in the daily life of Latinas and

Latinos. And although certain concepts of spirituality have regional or ethnic roots, the present, growing, national Latina/o reality is that these different understandings of spirituality are no longer exclusively regional, but are in contact with other traditions as they transform present understandings and actions. Just as the Latina/o population of the United States is more diverse than is commonly perceived, so are the many Latino/a concepts of spirituality.

Because of the mobility of the diverse Latino/a peoples, it is helpful to speak of shared characteristics rather than exclusively of a small set of practices and traditions. Because of the predominance of some groups in certain parts of the United States, some religious and spiritual practices will be more dominant and formal systematic expressions more visible; however, it is also necessary to affirm that the lived religiosity of Latinos and Latinas includes more than official formulations. Part of the difficulty in discussing such matters is that the categories usually chosen to talk about religion (such as Roman Catholic, Protestant, and non-Christian) reflect the still dominant but problematic three-part concept of US religion, developed in the 1950s, of Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish (Herberg 1983), or most commonly expressed in variations of the statement that the United States is a Judeo-Christian nation. The spiritualities present in the diverse Latino/a communities in the United States resist any such neat threefold categorization. What might be initially labeled as Roman Catholic appears in various Protestant contexts and vice versa. Aspects of Latino/a spirituality and religiosity initially labeled as non-Christian beliefs and practices outside the officially accepted parameters of Christianity arise inside the popular Christian religiosity of Protestants and Roman Catholics. But a focus on everyday religious practices is one of the best windows on Latino/a religious and cultural life in all its different manifestations. And this in turn will shed light on how Latino/a Protestant popular religion and spirituality are manifested.

Appreciating Latino/a Protestant theologizing is best done through one set of lenses that the *iglesias evangélicas* (Latino/a Protestant churches, but *evangélica* has a much broader range of meaning than the English “Evangelical”) use, namely the contrast with Latino/a popular Catholicism. As is well known, in Latino/a Roman Catholic settings common religious practices found across groups include attending mass, observing annual events such as the Via Crucis on Good Friday, and family and personal devotions to the Virgin Mary and the saints. Moreover, devotions to the Virgin Mary often take on national or ethnic expression; for example, Mexican American/Chicano Catholics typically express devotion to the Virgen de Guadalupe, whereas Cuban Americans venerate the Virgin of Caridad de Cobre, while Dominicans have a national devotion to La Virgen de la Altagracia. Other typical practices include participation in annual festivals of patron saints, the making and keeping of *promesas* (promises or vows), and the construction and maintenance of home altars. A practice found among Chicano/Mexican Americans but also spreading to other Latino/a groups is the annual observance of the Day of the Dead (usually around October 31–November 2, which includes All Saints’ Day and All Souls’ Day), which despite its

name is understood by some practitioners as a celebration of life, as they remember the dear departed through feasting and visits to grave sites.

Latino/a Protestant religious practices are equally diverse, but share some common characteristics. For theological reasons closely tied to religious identity, a majority of Latino/a Protestants very intentionally avoid religious practices that seem too Catholic, such as those already summarized, including devotion to the Virgin Mary or the company of canonized saints, or that might in some way be perceived to be in conflict with Christian beliefs and practices. This must be qualified, because there are exceptions; for example, some Latino/a Episcopalians practice devotion to the Virgin Mary. In any case, this different approach for the majority is a fundamental and widespread assumption in the theologizing of Latino/a popular Protestantism.

Since there is a conscious effort to avoid the material religion and certain practices of Latino/a Catholics, Latino/a Protestant popular religion and spirituality take on other forms. Elizabeth Conde-Frazier identifies several sources that are drawn upon for the construction of distinctive Latino/a Protestant spiritualities, namely the Bible, theology, and Spanish mysticism (Conde-Frazier 1997: 125–30). From these foundations Conde-Frazier then identifies two basic characteristics of Latino/a Protestant spirituality: *testimonios* and daily devotions. These in turn impact Christian service and sacrifice and how the community gathers in worship, in other words how it theologizes in daily life (Aponte 1995, 2012). As Pedraja observes, the common thread in Latino/a Protestant popular religion manifestations “tend to be linguistic and word centered. Protestants, for example, might not display images of the Virgin on their walls. But they proudly display Bible verses such as John 3:16. They may also give *testimonios* (testimonies) in worship services. These testimonies serve as forms of empowerment for those offering them” (Pedraja 2003: 81). It is in the provenance of a word-centered popular spirituality that Latino/a *evangélicos/as* do their formal and grassroots theologies.

As a word-based spirituality, Latino/a Protestant popular theology also is deeply influenced by preaching. Jiménez and González (2006: 31) describe part of the agenda of the Latino/a preachers as to hold together several concerns, namely to develop a homiletical theory that recognizes that preaching is theological interpretation and is focused on the function and content of the sermon for the contexts in which these words will be delivered. That context includes not only an interpretation of the biblical text, but also an interpretation of the life experiences of Latinas and Latinos who daily confront the ordeals of maintaining cultural identity. Moreover, the word of Latino/a Protestant preaching ought to equip Latino/a people to resist social evils that can destroy the people, including racism, sexism, xenophobia, and other challenges that are part of the fight for life (*lucha por la vida*). Preaching is one of the places where more formal or official religion and theology intersect and inform Latino/a Protestant popular theologies and spiritualities. Latino/a preachers may have one set of goals in the proclamation of the word, but how Latino/a people actually receive, incorporate, and apply the word to their daily lives and their own theological formulations is another matter altogether.

Another major linguistic and word-centered expression of Latino/a Protestant popular religion and spirituality is through the common practice of the delivery and reception of a word of prophecy, which is most often received as a word from God. Depending on the particular congregational context, such a prophetic word may be an instance of someone speaking in tongues followed by an interpretation, usually from a different person (see 1 Corinthians 14:4), or the speaking of a word of wisdom or knowledge (see 1 Corinthians 12:8). This is an area of Latino/a Protestant popular religion and spirituality where inherited ecclesiastical categories may not apply, as the word of prophecy can happen in multiple contexts without regard to denominational traditions or official theologies. In describing this phenomenon, Maldonado Pérez, Otero-Martell, and Conde-Frazier explain that

Prophecy as a communal invitation to reexamine the tradition allows for the tradition to be reformed as it is weighed against new truth claims in new times (1 Cor 14:29). The notion of a prophet as a visionary and advocate for justice is becoming strong in the *evangélica* community. Prophecy is a word that reimagines and remakes the world. As such, it refashions the mind, imagination, and the life of the prophet. It also informs her work in the community. (Maldonado Pérez, Martell-Otero, and Conde-Frazier 2013: 24)

In a context that consciously redefines representational and devotional dimensions of its faith, Latino/a Protestant popular spirituality and religion find multiple ways of expression that distinguish them from their Latino/a Catholic counterparts (while also displaying continuities). While the use of the more material aspects of religion may be limited (for example, a minority of Latino/a Protestants will construct a home altar, although some do create a Bible-centered prayer space), Latino/a popular religion still takes place. Since visible representation is one of the most prominent means of theological differentiation among Latino/a Protestants a major acceptable pathway for most is through music. Traditional hymns, worship songs commonly called *coros* or *coritos*, and more contemporary expressions of religious music are often the means to distinguish one popular Protestant expression from another.

Moreover, Latino/a Protestant religious practices are characterized by exuberant communal worship with a great deal of singing, public prayer, and individual stories of how the practitioner believes God is working in their lives, usually called *testimonio* or testimony, as Pedraja noted. Teresa Chávez-Sauceda writes “In worship the Latina/o Faith Community makes intentional collective choices about their own emerging cultural mestizaje and identity as a community, navigating the interplay between their distinctive ethnic identities in relation to each other and the dominant Eurocentric culture” (2006: 255). Chávez-Sauceda asserts that out of this activity there emerges a key theological theme of community as a value taking precedence over individualistic faith, a core value that often is expressed in worship. Bible studies and prayer meetings also are common practices across Protestant groups, whereas among many Latino/a Pentecostals healings and glossolalia or speaking in tongues are common.

Ubiquitous in both individual and corporate Latino/a Protestant spirituality is the *coro* or *corito*. The definition of *corito* is a simple one: it is a short popular chorus (Aponte 1995: 56–66). In some settings the term *estribillo* is used as an alternative designation. In numerous Latino/a Protestant faith communities, *coritos* function in multiple ways as a verbal expression of popular religion and spirituality, as a flexible liturgical tool, as an approved way to bring into religious settings folk rhythms and instruments, and as an instrument for the formation of religious and cultural identities. Functioning as a Christian symbol, *coritos* are a medium for making communal and individual sense of the world, and for providing both a concrete point of contact with the ineffable and a context in which religious thinking and behavior can take place. *Coritos* used in the worship and everyday life of these faith communities arose from the life situations of the people themselves. The people hold *coritos* in affection and esteem in their everyday devotional piety.

Coritos used in communal worship and individual daily devotions are typically biblically based in wording and put to a variety of tunes with a range of instruments. As the Spanish grammatical diminutive of the word *coro*, the name itself can be interpreted as an indicator of affection for these songs. *Coritos* are found in both Roman Catholic and Protestant settings, with some of the same *coritos* appearing in both contexts. While *coritos* have been collected in songbooks for ready reference, this does not appear to be where they first emerged. It seems that *coritos* arose from the life situations of the people themselves, and often the exact origin of specific songs is unknown (Ramirez 2009: 150–6). Later these *coritos* often appear in photocopied collections, in pamphlets, as overhead transparencies, or in PowerPoint presentations, and in many cases without musical notation. Sometimes a well-known *corito* is given a new verse that reflects the specific life-situation of a particular congregation. *Coritos* express the concrete manifestations of the supernatural in the everyday for various Latina/Latino faith communities, and in that way directly relate to spirituality's characteristic of connecting the practitioner to the transcendent. *Coritos* in particular function as a symbolic vehicle of faith, that is as a vehicle for making communal and individual sense in the world, as a point of contact with the divine, and as a context within which theological thinking and behavior take place. And in that sense *coritos* are appropriated as shared *testimonios*, testimonies.

Carlos Cardoza-Orlandi identifies another dimension of Latino/a Protestant popular spirituality in the grassroots hymns and *coritos*: their description of an erotic relationship with Jesus Christ. The theology that emerges from the experience of *lo cotidiano* is of an extremely intimate relationship between Latino/a believers and God through Jesus Christ. While Cardoza-Orlandi provides many examples, including “El Amor de Dios,” “Al Abrigo del Altísimo,” and “Divino Compañero,” one song in particular is worthy of noting here as an example: “Qué Lindo Es Mi Cristo” (“How Beautiful is My Christ”). Cardoza-Orlandi observes that “one of the most surprising references to Christ is that he is *lindo* – beautiful. This image of a beautiful Christ is enriched by the fact that this hymn is a bolero, a musical beat that invites intimacy and

desire . . . Tender touch and beauty are Christ's gifts to the believer and sinner" (2009: 162). The theology that emerges from this type of spirituality is that it is perfectly acceptable and indeed life-giving to envision the relationship with God and Christ in such familiar and intimate terms.

Building on that concept of intimacy with the divine is another important vehicle for Latino/a Protestant popular theologizing that takes place in the popular religious music of worship and personal devotion. Popular theology includes appearance and transmission outside formal institutional structures; the expression of the expectation of the presence of the supernatural in everyday life; homegrown cultural elements including concepts, thought patterns, rhythms, and instruments; and the expression of deeply held faith; all of which are both communal and individual in their use and impact. One of the most popular *coros/coritos*, entitled "Alabaré" ("I Will Praise"), demonstrates these various elements of popular religion and spirituality: the verbal focus, the use of the Bible, a mystical dimension, and the theologizing of the people regarding their faith and live situations. In use for decades across generations throughout the Americas, this simple song almost has de facto canonical status. The words of "Alabaré" are simple enough:

I will praise, I will praise, I will praise my Lord. [twice]
 John saw the number of the redeemed
 And all praised the Lord
 Some sang, some prayed
 But all praised the Lord.

"Alabaré," in its simple allusion to John of the Apocalypse seeing the innumerable redeemed, functions as an enculturated vehicle of praise to God, an invitation for others to join in the praise, and thereby becomes a shared public testimony (*testimonio*) of connection to God the redeemer, and a declaration of multiple ways to praise God. While the tune is simple and straightforward, it can be contextualized in many music forms connected with folk and popular music, and also serves as a flexible tool of theology in the moment. *Alabaré* also readily lends itself to all types of musical forms, especially popular music.

Popular music is a most telling proof for the ongoing development of a national Latino/a culture. At the same time, music in Latina/a religious communities often has a love/hate relationship with Latino/a and Latin American folk and popular music. Again, the sacred/profane division is viewed from a different perspective, in that if Latino/a communities do indeed exhibit a more holistic integration and orientation toward life, then the ambivalence about and occasional opposition to the use of popular ("profane") music in religious settings becomes more understandable. For instance, in many families it is a common occurrence to have a radio always on in the living room or kitchen, tuned to a Spanish-language station. The constant music (literally and figuratively) provides an everyday aural background from the land of parents and

grandparents, or the most recent popular music. In such a context at some level Latino/a religious and spiritual music either tries to create something totally distinctive from the popular music that is part of the cultural background, or adapts popular music and infuses it with sacredness and redemptive power. Increasingly, Latino/a religious music intentionally is appropriating elements of popular music. Either approach is reflective of part of what goes on in Latino/a popular religion.

Therefore, within Latino/a Protestantism music functions in multiple ways as an avenue of communication, a symbolic focus point, an intersection between the sacred and the everyday, and ,a means through which the sacred is brought into the everyday, *lo cotidiano*. The sacred source of meaning and sense-making is brought to the context of experience through a ritual use of music. Music is an integral part of the sacred facts of Latino/a theological, liturgical, and spiritual musical experiences, and presents a type of popular wisdom as popular religion and spirituality.

Within Latino/a Protestant communities the use of music as popular religion and spirituality is the result of contextual cultural blendings, especially if the music is seen as inappropriate for a traditional ecclesiastical or religious context. Some Latino/a religious groups oppose the use of popular music and rhythms as inappropriate for worship and other religious settings. One example of a clash of attitudes regarding the use of music from non-ecclesial contexts as part of Latino/a Protestant religion and spirituality is found in this story from Raquel Gutiérrez-Aichón:

I wanted to introduce into our church some of the hymns that Dr. Roberto Escamilla would classify as truly Hispanic music, and that express our sense of celebration. It shocked my mother, who was a very faithful Christian. She was alarmed to the point that one day after we arrived home from a Sunday service, she told me, "Just to think that after I prayed for years, that whatever talent you had you would dedicate to the Lord, you are the one now to bring the Devil to our services." It took some very careful explaining on my part to somehow be able to change (to some extent) her way of thinking. One of my strongest arguments was, of course, my growing concern to preserve our cultural heritage in our worship and music as well. Our hymnody has been separate from the mainstream of all other music, and church music should be treated so as to be relevant to our culture. Our hymns and songs must be given expression in and by our culture. (1996: 105)

This vignette shows that in the ongoing creation and re-creation of Latino/a Protestant spirituality there are generational issues at play, which may get expressed as a worry about what is suitable, along with seeking to link worship with cultural heritage, all of which displays interaction between religion, spirituality, theology, and culture in particular contexts, which might yield new traditions. Music in liturgy and everyday devotion can be the symbolic focus of a theology that is lived out as a place of articulation of the relationship between Latino/a Protestant spirituality, religion, language, and the struggles and joys of ordinary life.

Examples of folk music that becomes part of Latino/a Protestant popular religion and spirituality are many. The music of what became Mexico after the Spanish con-

quest is one example, as it includes drums, rattles, reed and clay flutes, and conch-shell horns, as well as European instruments such as violins, guitars and harps, brass, and woodwind. It was a joining not only of instruments but also of rhythms in a fusion of cultures that produced something new. From these mixes – indigenous, *mestizo*, African, Spanish, and later European influences – the diverse music of Mexico emerged. While we do well to note the counsel of Carmen Nanko-Fernández not to construct and explore too narrowly the complex hybrid identities of Latinos/as by restricting them solely to the categories of *mestizaje* and *mulatez* (2010: 18), it is those types of cultural synthesis that yield forms drawn upon for culturally informed Latino/a Protestant spirituality.

Mexican American folk and traditional music genres reflect the regional identities formed by the coming together of cultures in specific historical contexts in Mexico and the US. One type that has entered religious and spiritual settings is mariachi, which has taken on a larger symbolic meaning in terms of a declaration of identity. The ways that mariachi music is incorporated into both Catholic and Protestant popular spiritual ritual and cultural life again shows the difficulties in maintaining a strict sacred/secular division. In addition to being incorporated into the Roman Catholic mass and Protestant worship services, mariachi music is brought into other festive occasions, significant moments, and rites of passage, such as weddings, *quiceañeras* (religious and cultural celebration of a girl's fifteenth birthday, which is becoming more commonplace in Latino/a Protestant settings), birthdays, baptisms, weddings, holidays, saints' days, and funerals. Another tradition in Mexico and Mexican American communities that has spread throughout the Latino/a population and goes beyond strict religious boundaries is the performance of "Las Mañanitas," an example of the confluence of popular culture, music, and popular religion. Traditionally, relatives and friends, accompanied by musicians, sing this song to a particular person early on the morning of their birthday, but "Las Mañanitas" also is showing up more and more in Latino/a Protestant contexts despite some of its decidedly non-*evangélica* lyrics.

An additional type of popular music that is used in Latino/a Protestant settings can be found in examples of specific Puerto Rican musical forms, including the Bomba and the Plena. The Bomba is thought to have derived from ritual dances of African slaves. The Plena is a blend of different cultures but relies heavily on African tradition. Both elements developed in those coastal areas with a concentration of African descendants. The Plena rhythm has strong African roots but also uses other music genres such as those of the Taíno (indigenous people of Puerto Rico) and jíbaro (the traditional country people), danzas, and other European styles. These rhythms are used in Puerto Rican religious settings, most notably in the singing and playing of *coritos*, as well as other Latino/a Protestant hymns and worship songs.

Latino/a Protestant popular theologizing is not restricted to formal ecclesiastical settings. In addition to these and other streams of traditional Latin American music that find their way into contemporary US Latino/a religious contexts, there is the phenomenon of Latino/a contemporary Christian music. Latino/a Christian pop music is influencing Latino/a Protestant spirituality and theology. Examples of this include

the work of Jaci Velasquez, Freddie Colloca, and Juan Luis Guerra. Colloca, Velasquez, and Guerra are examples of Latina and Latino musical artists who are connected to their roots, are part of the US Latino/a reality, and sing spiritual Christian music across genres. Both Velasquez and Colloca are recipients of the Dove Christian music awards.

Freddie Colloca was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, but grew up in Miami, Florida. Colloca's father, a Charismatic pastor, was part of a Christian folk group in Latin America who grew up in Miami's heavily Hispanic Hialeah community. Colloca records in Spanish and English, adding to his crossover appeal. Of Mexican descent, Jaci Velasquez was a musical prodigy as a child and grew up singing with the family Christian band in Houston, Texas. Both Colloca and Velasquez had hits that unequivocally draw upon popular music for their religious songs. Both of these artists subsequently recorded popular music while still recording religious pop, selling in record-breaking ways in both categories. Juan Luis Guerra, a Dominican singer and composer internationally known for his work in merengue, bachata, salsa, and Latin pop, has sold millions of recordings and won Latin Grammy, Grammy, and Billboard awards. Guerra became actively involved in a Christian church, and in 2004 began releasing Christian theme music targeted at his broader international audiences. One example is the merengue "Las Avispas" ("The Wasps") (Guerra 2004), the lyrics of which include the following (in translation): "I have a wonderful God in heaven, and the love of the Holy Spirit; by his grace I am a new man and my song is full of joy . . . Jesus told me to laugh, if the enemy tempts me in the race. And he also told me, 'Don't worry about it because I sent my wasps to sting him.' It's the truth!" An initial theological analysis shows that this song, sung by thousands of fans in concert, is a Trinitarian *testimonio* that affirms that Jesus will protect those committed to him.

Colloca, Velasquez, and Guerra perform to capacity audiences both in the United States and in Latin America and appear on major television programs. All three record in Spanish and English, and Colloca in some of his songs goes back and forth between the two languages. These are examples of crossover musical artists whose music draws upon kinds of Latino/a music. Clearly they are influenced by Latino/a popular spirituality and religion, but because of the broader appeal of artists such as these, one may ask to what extent they are influencing broader concepts of Latino/a spirituality in general as well as Latino/a Protestant popular religion and theology.

Another musical artist who has been a major influence in the development of Latino/a and Latin American Protestant popular spirituality through sacred music is Marcos Witt. The child of US American missionaries who grew up in Durango, Mexico, and studied music at the University of Juarez there, Witt is the composer of worship songs in Spanish and English that have sold millions of copies. His compositions are used widely in Spanish-speaking congregations across the Americas, and include the tracks from his debut album *Canción a Dios* ("A Song to God"). Witt performs in concerts throughout the United States and Latin America and also served for

10 years as pastor of the Hispanic congregation at the non-denominational Lakewood Church, a charismatic mega-church in Houston, Texas, where Joel Osteen serves as senior pastor. Through his recording label CanZion, Witt provides an opportunity for new generations of Latino/a Protestant sacred music to be produced and disseminated. One of his most popular songs is “Sobrenatural” (“Supernatural”); YouTube video of a live conference performance is readily available and has had over two million viewings. The lyrics are (in translation):

Supernatural
 you are God without equal, owner of sky and sea
 Supernatural.
 Supernatural, you dwell in eternity, you are the source,
 Supernatural.
 God of my life,
 you are God of the heavens,
 you are the God of the seas
 Supernatural.
 You are God of the earth,
 You are God of my sustenance,
 Always eternal you are God,
 Supernatural.

(Campos and Witt 2008)

The theology here is as accessible as the song, another *testimonio* proclaiming the sovereign eternal God who yet is still concerned for and provides for the individual believer. Even as Witt produces and popularizes new song for Latino/a Protestant spirituality, in the vanguard of a new generation of Latino/a Protestant sacred music, interestingly in his concerts he regularly does a medley of older *coros/coritos*, which seems to always include “Alabaré,” clearly an old-time favorite that continues to have currency among Latino/a Protestants. So there appears to be grassroots continuity in elements of Latino/a Protestant popular spirituality.

All of these musical types and more are found in Latino/a Protestant life and are means of creating and passing on theology. There is a great deal of flexibility and one cannot point to one standard, or even a sharp division between popular/folk music and religious music. The instruments and rhythms may be different, but the presence of music is widespread. Latino/a Protestant popular spirituality and theology give a focus for thoughts, feelings, and attitudes, as well as a vehicle of expression. At the same time, Latino/a Protestant popular spirituality through music contributes both to communal and to individual interpretation and navigation of multiple cultural worlds, and provides points of contact for the transcendent and the context for religious practices, experiences, and understandings. Additionally, the culture, history, and identity of those people who are integral parts of the Latino/a Protestant communities have been preserved through music. Latino/a

Protestant spirituality through music is an expression of the popular wisdom of these people as it is incorporated into their everyday, unpretentious faith expression. It is a major vehicle for a culturally rich transmission of spirituality that may be sung in Spanish, English, Spanglish, or one of the indigenous languages of Latin America. The religious and spiritual music may be Tejano, Norteño, mariachi, a *cumbia*, salsa, Latin, boleros, *baladas*, *música religiosa* (religious music), *música evangélica* (evangelical music), *cantos*, *coros/coritos*, or *cantos espirituales* (spiritual songs). The rhythm may be African or Andean. In fact there is eclecticism in Latino/a Protestant popular spirituality as one of the symbolic tools used to make sense of worlds, in other words to do theology. These symbols are not only the religious symbols at work in smaller religious communities, but also function as part of clusters of symbols in a larger religious and spiritual system or worldview, which provides the context and resources for everyday living. Part of what this means is that the diverse and mostly verbal expressions among Latino/a Protestant communities should be understood on their own terms, from the perspectives of the people in specific communities, who use music and other avenues of spirituality in their own situations and contexts. There is a capacity in all the expressions of Latino/a Protestant spirituality to recognize and verbalize other realities of life and occasionally energize people to help transform those realities, as they simultaneously serve Latino/a communities as vehicles for meditation, association, analysis, cultural critique, and energizing engagement. And when that happens, it is Latino/a Protestant popular theology in action.

In looking to the future, certainly understanding the multiple ways in which Latino/a Protestant popular religion and spirituality do their theology for daily life can be studied more extensively. Such a future should include exploring the connections between Catholic and Protestant manifestations of popular religion and spirituality. It is quite possible that, despite a history of differentiation and self-definition through contrast with the other, at least on a rhetorical level, there may be more and more of an overlap between Latino/a Catholics and Protestants. A further area of exploration could be an examination of the contributions that Latino/a Protestant spirituality can make to a greater understanding of Christian spirituality more broadly, as well as other forms of non-Christian spirituality. The expressions of popular/folk worship songs offer a clue. Often academic studies of Christian spirituality are primarily focused on a closed set of practices that had their origin in early Christianity. Additional exploration of Latino/a popular spirituality as it is practiced in daily life will not only give new insight into those ancient practices being employed in increasingly globalized contexts, but also has the potential of identifying new insights regarding spirituality. Related to this possible avenue of further study is the question of to what extent North American religious and spiritual concepts and constructions are influencing Latino/a Protestant popular religion and spirituality. But the opposite question is at least equally pertinent, especially in light of demographic realities, namely to what extent Latino/a Protestant

popular religion and spirituality are reshaping North American religious and spiritual concepts and constructions. Answering that question could be like finding a goldmine in understanding the theologizing that takes place in popular Latino/a Protestantism.

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CHAPTER 23

The Study of Spirituality

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In 1988, US Latino and Latina (Latino/a) theologians formed the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States (ACHTUS) in order to enhance their collaboration in doing theology en conjunto. The formation of this academic society was in itself an act of Latino/a spirituality, a spirituality that values collaboration, familia, and a pastoral de y en conjunto. Over the years ACHTUS theologians have worked together with each other and with members of the Latino/a communities of the United States to write our theologies. These theologies include a wealth of christologies, biblical studies, pneumatologies, mariologies, ecclesiologies, religious studies, ethics, and pastoral theologies, to name a few, because these are the areas our scholars have been trained in. However, when it comes to the theological science of spirituality (studies) the offerings have been sparse as only a handful of us are actual spiritualogians¹ trained in the field.

A few years ago I was asked to write an essay on spirituality in Latino/a theology. I did my licentiate and doctoral studies in spirituality in Rome, and therefore I was very unfamiliar with Latina and Latino theologians beyond Virgilio Elizondo and Andres G. Guerrero. I ended up spending time in the library looking through the tables of contents and indexes of various books written by any number of Latino/a theologians. I was surprised to discover how rarely the word “spirituality” appeared in book or chapter titles and indexes. My task ended up being a difficult, albeit enriching one. I discovered a variety of Tio and Tia-logians² who, despite the fact that they do not do spirituality (studies), write spirituality between the lines of their theologies.

Any scholar of spirituality (studies) looking to write about spirituality among Latino/as³ will have to deal with scholars like myself who have being trained in the science of spirituality, but they will also have to deal with systematic theologians, biblicists,

liturgists, pastoral theologians, religious studies scholars, and a variety of other scholars and theologians, because the spirituality of Latina/os is found between the lines of all our works.

I would like to divide this chapter into various sections dealing with spirituality. First I would like to explain just what spiritualogians like myself mean when we speak of spirituality. Next I will consider what Latino/a theologians are saying about spirituality in their theologies either explicitly or between the lines. This will naturally move me to consider a number of themes that are part and parcel of the spirituality found in Latino/a theology. I will conclude by offering a Latino/a method for the study of Christian spirituality.

Short History of the Term

Ontologically, we Christians believe, every human being is made up of body, soul, and spirit (1 Thessalians 5:23); consequently every person is somehow spiritual and spirituality has been part and parcel of the human condition from the onset. Spirituality or rather spiritualities are an ancient human reality, but only recently has spirituality come to be as an independent field of study. As a Christian phenomenon spirituality has a long and convoluted history.

“Spirituality” stems from the Hebrew *ruah* (breath, wind, spirit) and the Greek *pneuma* (air, life energy, spirit) found in the sacred Scriptures. Spirit, then is within us and all around us. In the writings of Paul, *pneuma* becomes closely associated with the Holy Spirit and all the faithful are expected to be *pneumatikoi*, which is to say spiritual by virtue of baptism.

While the New Testament encourages Christians to live spiritually, you will never find the word “spirituality” in it, or in the Old Testament, for that matter. The term, originally coined in Latin, comes from a fifth-century French bishop named Faustus, who used it in a letter⁴ urging a newly baptized Christian to *age ut in spiritualitatis* (“act [in such a way] so as [to grow] in spirituality”), which is to say in a spiritual manner. Slowly the new term came to mean living spiritually, that is, leading a Holy Spirit-filled life. “At the time, spirituality was part and parcel of theology, because theology was part and parcel of the pastoral care of the faithful” (Cavazos-González 2009a: 750).

Spiritualitas has a long and convoluted history,⁵ taking it from being something that all the baptized were expected to have and develop to the exclusive domain of consecrated religious men and women, and then reserved to mystics and the occasional heretic, and more recently to something that all human beings hold in common. During these twists and turns *spiritualitas* was translated into French, Italian, and Spanish in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, possibly in the hope that clerics and lay Christians would see it as their own and not just the prerogative of consecrated religious. At the same time, “Scholastic theology came to see *spiritualitas* as relegated

to emotional interiority and ‘special experiences,’ separated from both public life and social praxis” (Cavazos-González 2010a: 3).

The English word “spirituality” has been around since the 1930’s and only became a part of the general parlance in the late 1950’s. On the other hand [even though] the Spanish equivalent “*espiritualidad*” has been around since the sixteenth century ... it too has only recently become a part of the general parlance. Very few of Hispanic spiritual writers over the centuries have even used the term “*espiritualidad*”, preferring to speak instead of “union with God”, the “life of perfection”, justification, sanctification, piety, devotion, mystica and even popular religiosity. (Cavazos-González 2009a: 749)

Description of Spirituality

Spiritualitas was translated into the English “spirituality” in order to translate the work of French theologian Pierre Pourrat on Christian spirituality. Slowly it made its way into the common vernacular, and what began as a Christian term has become universal, with a plethora of meanings in religious and secular circles. So for the purposes of this chapter, I need to clarify what I mean by spirituality before I consider how Latino/a theologians understand spirituality.

Academically, the question “What is spirituality?” is an unfair one because spirituality can be discussed according to several different understandings. The only correct answer to “What is spirituality?” is “According to which understanding?”

In writing this chapter on spirituality in Latino/a theology I made a conscious decision to write as a spiritualogian, focusing on the academic understanding of spirituality as a theological discipline dedicated to the study of spirituality. I will explain what I mean by this further on. For the sake of clarity, I will speak of it as spirituality studies rather than simply spirituality.

Spirituality studies is a relatively young field of study in Christian theological circles and Latina/o spirituality studies, per se, is virtually non-existent. While many Latino/a theologians deal with the phenomenon of spirituality in their study of traditions and traditioning, few do so as spiritualogians or scholars of spirituality studies. Latino/a theologians interested in spirituality studies have much to glean from the work of Latin American theologians as well as US spiritualogians. One such theologian is Gustavo Gutierrez, who, in his book *Beber en su propio pozo*, was able to discern three stages in the development of Christian spirituality. These are:

1. an existential stage: life changing experiences that give life meaning, for example those of Jesus, Mary, the twelve apostles, Mary Magdalene and other saints and heroes
2. a communal stage: the doctrines, devotions, art, schools of thought, and traditions which arise from a community’s assimilation of the experiences of its teachers and heroes

3. and a formational stage: the study and development of new ways of being Christian individually and communally. (Gutierrez 1983: 52–3)

These three stages of development fit quite naturally into four levels of spirituality discerned by the US theologian Michael Downey. Spirituality is (1) an essential part of being human; (2) the experience of the quest for integration and self-transcendence; (3) communal expressions of insights gained from the experience; and (4) an academic study (Downey 1997: 43).

The Roman-trained spiritualogian David Perrin proposes four characteristics of a working definition of spirituality. It is the (1) fundamental spiritual nature of human beings, (2) which recognizes that life is bigger than one's self, thus moving individuals to self-transcendence through meaningful intimate relationships. In this way (3) spirituality is experienced as a lived reality that becomes a way of life (cultural and/or religious) with corresponding attitudes, practices, rituals, and behaviors. And finally, (4) spirituality is a field of academic study that studies how people live spiritually (Perrin 2007: Kindle location 579–600).

After years of working with these stages, levels, and characteristics, I have reconfigured them as five ways of understanding spirituality. When speaking of spirituality we tend to do so:

1. **as ontology:** We are by our very nature corporal, soulful and spiritual beings, which is to say physical, reflective and transcendent.
2. **as experience:** We experience human life as mobile because it is a journey of growth or decline in relationship to others.
3. **as classical:** Spirituality is relational and is often expressed communally in spiritual classics which are cultural and/or religious wisdom, expressions, and traditions.
4. **as a science:** Spirituality as a scholarly discipline studies the first three understandings of spirituality in a variety of ways and with varying degrees of academic rigor.
5. **as an art form:** For Christians, the study of spirituality cannot simply be the gathering of information. Spiritually, we are called to shape a better world and to help in each other's corporal, soulful, and spiritual formation.

When I speak of spirituality, I do so from each of these understandings, and in reading my fellow Latina and Latino theologians I find they do so as well explicitly or between the lines. As a person of faith I speak of spirituality ontologically, experientially, and classically, while as a scholar I speak of spirituality as a science and an art form. My preference is to speak of spirituality as an art form because, like every art form, it requires grace and study, spontaneity and discipline; talent and training. It investigates the spiritual masters and masterpieces of our past and present by considering the ontology and experience that makes them classics worth studying and imitating. This is the *corazón* of spirituality studies, the appropriation of the spiritual

classics, people, and movements of our past to inspire the cotidianidad of spiritual growth in a contemporary audience.

Because spirituality studies is an art form, it is necessarily self-implicating. US theologians working in the area of spirituality studies rightfully place a special stress on self-implication as crucial to the study of Christian spirituality. Spiritualogian Mary Frohlich affirms that "What we study, how we study, what we learn is rooted in our own spiritual living . . . this makes the study of spirituality a tremendously energizing and exciting process . . . it creates significant challenges – as well as opportunities" (Frohlich 2001: 68). As a Latino spiritualogian, I cannot help but study and write about spirituality from my own rootedness in a Latino perspective and context. At the same time, as a Latino theologian I am challenged to study and write from my people's Latino/a perspectives and contexts. Latino/a theologians write their theology attending not only to their own experience but more so to the truth of our peoples' experience and belief, creating challenges and opportunities for our peoples. This moves Latino/a theology and spirituality studies to what I call socio-implication. I will explain this further when I explain my Latino/a method for the study of Christian spirituality. First I would like to consider spirituality in Latino/a theology today.

Spirituality in Latino/a Theology

In this section I would like to begin by considering how various Latina/o theologians describe and define spirituality. As previously mentioned, most Latino/a theologians do not explicitly deal with spirituality studies in their work; rather they deal with the lived experience of the faith of the people, the Latino/a *sensus fidei*, and popular Catholicism or popular religion. In this way they are reflecting on the ontological, experiential, and classic understandings of spirituality already mentioned.

Having said this, I recognize that a few Latino/a theologians have directly addressed the topic of spirituality on Latina/os. Protestant theologian Rev. Elizabeth Conde-Frazier addressed the topic of spirituality among Latino/as from a Protestant perspective as early as 1979 (Conde-Frazier 1979). In 1983 the Jesuit theologian Eduardo Fernández wrote the entry on "Hispanic Spirituality" for *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (Fernández 1983). Ten years later, German Martinez, OSB, wrote "Hispanic American Spirituality" for the *New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* (Martinez 1993). That same year professor of Hispanic Christianity Eldin Villafañe tied the Holy Spirit to a social spirituality in his book on Pentecostal social ethics (Villafañe 1993).

In 2000 Rowman & Littlefield dedicated an ongoing book series to Latino/a spirituality and theology. That same year Lutheran theologian Alberto Garcia explained Christian spirituality in light of Latino/as (Garcia 2000). In 2004 religious studies professor Jeanette Rodriguez addressed the topic of *mujerista* spirituality (Rodriguez 2004). Then in 2005, the Jesuit theologian Allan Figueroa Deck proposed a new Latina/o model of Christian spirituality for America (Deck 2005). Religious studies professor

Sister Anita de Luna wrote on the connection between popular religion and spirituality in 2006 (de Luna 2006).

In 2009, Cubana theologian Michelle A. Gonzalez published a book inviting Catholic women to consider the wisdom of Latina spirituality (Gonzalez 2009). Three years later she published an engaging and challenging look at the spirituality of shopping (Gonzalez 2012).

In 2010, I published a book on the spirituality of Francis and Clare of Assisi as well as an introduction to the Christian spiritual life (Cavazos-González 2010b, 2010a). Both books are definitely from a Latino/a perspective, proving you don't have to write about spirituality among Latino/as to do Latino/a spirituality studies.

While those already mentioned have dealt specifically with spirituality, many other Latina/o theologians have done so between the lines of their theological discourse in a variety of ways. I'd like to consider how Latino/a theologians describe spirituality. Speaking both ontologically and experientially, pastoral theologian Bishop Ricardo Ramirez calls spirituality "the inner space that allows people to come in touch with themselves as believers." It is the area where "the divine spirit touches the human spirit" (Ramirez quoted in Perez, Covarrubias, and Foley 1994: 5). Religious studies scholar Sister Rosa María Icaza, CCVI, claims that spirituality "is translated into the love of God, which moves, strengthens and is manifested in love of neighbor and self" (Icaza quoted in Perez, Covarrubias, and Foley 1994: 5–6). Sister of Charity and theologian Dominga Zapata claims that Hispanic spirituality "is rooted in life [it is] how I relate to the sacred, to others and to myself" (Zapata quoted in Perez, Covarrubias, and Foley 1994: 66).

Elizabeth Conde Frazier affirms that spirituality is "connecting to and being led by Christ through the Holy Spirit" (Conde-Frazier 1979: 144). Methodist historian and theologian Justo González concurs: "The basis for Christian spirituality is the Spirit [of God]" (González 1990: 158), rather than the "spiritual" as opposed to the "material".

Anita de Luna, MCDP, speaks of popular religion as an expressed spirituality and uses the term "to refer to those religious experiences and practices that draw us outside of ourselves to the transcendent" (de Luna 2006: 105–6). Continuing in this line of relationship to the transcendent, Jeanette Rodriguez affirms that spirituality "is self-transcendence seeking meaning, purpose, and wholeness in the way one perceives the ineffable mystery of everyday life. ... connecting us to God, our Ultimate Reality" (Rodriguez 2004: 319).

While Rodriguez reminds us spirituality is not faith seeking understanding, Cuban-American theologian Orlando Espín claims that Catholic spirituality is "an *understanding* that emerges as the *result* of the way the same basic gospel dimensions are *combined* in the daily life of Christians" (Espín 1997: 26–7). These dimensions are (1) the perception of God; (2) choosing Jesus' most important moments and characteristics; (3) how community and neighbor are related to God, Jesus, and the individual believer; and finally, (4) based on the first three, what are proper options and lifestyles for a Christian.

This move of Christian spirituality to a proper lifestyle leads Pentecostal theologian Samuel Soliván to speak to the ontological understanding of spirituality when he claims that our current fascination with the spirit “reflects humankind’s quest after wholeness congruent with that innate spirituality given us by God as an extension of himself in the *imago Dei*” (Soliván 1997: 53). As *imago Dei*, created in the likeness and image of God, we are “spiritual beings.” Carmen Nanko-Fernández, although not explicitly speaking about spirituality, continues this discussion of the *imago Dei* in her 2008 presidential address to ACHTUS, expanding an *imago Dei* spirituality to underscore the “responsibilities that the agency of representation entails” (Nanko-Fernández 2009). Reflection on the *imago Dei* is a call for spiritual beings to act in mutuality and justice, which is to say right relationships with our neighbors.

Because spirituality is the *corazón* of our existence, it “is all about relationship, for no one can live an authentic human life without relating to the ‘other’ who is God and neighbor. It is in relationship that we are formed and that we develop who we are” (Cavazos-González 2004: 49). And who we are is God’s image and likeness in all our brokenness and limitations. Borrowing the Nahuatl understanding that a person is made up of *cara* (face: culture) and *corazón* (heart: spirituality), I like to describe spirituality as the *corazón* in which the soul nurtures and cares for both the spirit and the body that make it a person in a community of mutual responsibility (Cavazos-González 2004).

Beside describing Christian spirituality in general, some Latino/a theologians deal specifically with spirituality or spiritualities among Latino/as by moving into the scientific and art-form understandings of spirituality. One such scholar is Allan Figueroa Deck, who has written a number of works on Hispanic spirituality over the years. He does so at the scientific level researching various understandings of Hispanic spiritualities. Insisting that all understandings of spirituality are culturally conditioned, he describes spirituality “as encompassing all those ways in which the Christian faithful pursue and deepen their life of faith in Christ within Christian community” (Deck 1990: 140). He finds the modern Western notion of spirituality to be too privatized and individualistic when compared to the popular religion of Hispanic Catholics. In popular religion he finds a spirituality that contains a “sense of solidarity and community” (Deck 1990: 144).

Virgilo Elizondo expounds on *mestizaje* and popular religion in many of his writings even though he does not explicitly address spirituality in most of his works. He does, however, move into the art-form understanding of spirituality in his book *Charity*, part of the series “Catholic Spirituality for Adults.” He never really explains what spirituality is, but he does underscore that Hispanic spirituality is meant to be *servicial* and his book is meant to help form Christians in this understanding of Christian spirituality as charity and service (Elizondo 2009).

Eduardo Fernández recognizes that in the United States there is a need for new paradigms that take into account Latino/as’ spirituality; he then describes this as “their world of meaning in relation to the sacred” (Fernández 2000: 34). He then continues to call the Church to be the Church of the Poor in response to these new paradigms.

Although not a trained spiritualogian, religious studies professor Alexander Nava does a wonderful job of researching the spirituality of Simone Weil and Gustavo Gutierrez (Nava 2001), inviting his readers to consider the importance of justice and social involvement for the development of a truly Christian spirituality. In doing so he is helping move the contemporary reader from mere self-implication to socio-implication in the study of spirituality. He summarizes that Christian spirituality has before it “the task of instilling a spirit of love and freedom into conditions of oppression and injustice” (Nava 2001: 101).

A few Latino/a theologians such as Alejandro R. Garcia-Rivera deal with spirituality and the arts. He especially does a wonderful analysis of popular religious art as an expression of kataphatic spirituality, moving the viewers to passionate response (Garcia-Rivera 2003: 77). Art is creative and creativity is part and parcel of spirituality. Cecilia González-Andrieu’s work on art and beauty speaks to us not only of human longing but of creation’s longing for beauty, which is a way of life, a pull towards God, the source of all beauty (González-Andrieu 2012: 35). In the vein of creativity, spirituality, and art, Latino language scholar Orlando Ricardo Menes explores the wealth and variety of spirituality in both Latino/a and Latin American poetry (Menes 2003).

Theologians and scholars of religious studies are not the only academics interested in spirituality among Latino/as today. As early as 1985 Ricardo Ramirez wrote an article on Hispanic spirituality for a journal on religion in the social services (Ramirez 1985). This seems to have sparked an interest in the influence not only of culture but of spirituality and religion in the treatment of physical illnesses and psychical situations. Since the 1980s a number of Latino/a psychologists, sociologists, health care professionals, and cultural analysts have been researching Hispanic/Latino/a spiritualities. In the year 2000 professors Larry Ortiz, Sue Villereal, and Margaret Engel wrote an article entitled “Culture and Spirituality: A Review of Literature” in which they did a content analysis of over fifty articles addressing spirituality and religion they found fit a social work curriculum (Ortiz, Villereal, and Engel 2000).

Psychology professor Judith Arroyo has written about the importance of spirituality in treating Hispanics with alcoholism (Arroyo, Miller, and Tonigan 2003). Latina author Sandra Guzman recognizes the ontological and classical reality of spirituality when she claims “Even if religion is not central to your life, I’ll bet some form of spirituality remains deeply rooted in your soul. Our faith in a higher power is, I believe, ancestral” (Guzman 2011: 141).

Juana Bordas, founding president of the National Hispana Leadership Institute (NHLI), fills her book *Salsa, Soul and Leadership* with references to spirituality, insisting the spirituality of Native Americans, Latino/as, and African Americans is central to communities of color and offers “a renewed sense of our common humanity that is founded in our responsibility to one another and in our commitment to creating a society that cares for its people” (Bordas 2007: Kindle location

2613). "Spirituality in communities of color centers on people. . . . Seeing spiritual responsibility as doing good for others has been quintessential in communities of color. This . . . drives a collective and spiritually responsible form of leadership. Similar to the rising tide that lifts all boats, spirituality is a unifying force that uplifts the whole community" (Bordas 2007: Kindle location 2899).

The importance of spirituality for leadership is not simply a topic of interest to sociologists and psychologists; Latina theologians have also dealt with the subject of leadership, especially as regards Latinas. Jeanette Rodriguez, for example, published an article on spirituality and Latina leadership in 1999. In it she writes "Our spirituality thus becomes the inspiration of our leadership and connection to past acts of leadership, which is expressed in everything that we do that sustains life. It involves learning how to live in a way that encapsulates the whole of our deepest convictions, our ways of thinking, feeling, and especially in our ways of acting" (Rodriguez 1999: 145).

Research among Latino/as indicates "that spirituality and religiosity are interwoven with their daily lives and serve as foundations of strength in coping with life's struggles. . . . Latinos describe their faith as intimate and reciprocal relationships with God, family and community, with these relationships playing an important role in health and well-being" (Campesino and Schwartz 2006: 4).

While many like to maintain that spirituality among Latina/os is family oriented, we need to contextualize that affirmation by saying that Latinoa/a spirituality is both popular and communal because of the socio-centered nature of many Hispanic cultures. "Popular" means that it comes from and belongs to the people. It is by being part of the people that the individual is formed and cultivated, "traditioned," if you will (Espín 2006: 10).

Classic Themes in Latino/a Theologies

As previously mentioned, most Latino/a theologians speak of spirituality between the lines. They do so by addressing a variety of spiritual themes. Before considering the spiritual themes that I have discerned in Latina/o theologies, I would like to recognize that other scholars have discerned themes in spiritualities among Latino/as. Alberto Garcia claims there are four foundational themes in Hispanic/Latino spirituality: la familia, mestizaje, popular religiosity, and festive hope (Garcia 2000: 53). Eduardo Fernández points out that Hispanic spiritualities share several important characteristics: they are relational, emotional, festive, Christocentric, and transcendent (Fernández 2001).

The Latino, whom Eldin Villafañe calls *Homos Hispanicus*, has eight characteristics that effect Latino/as spiritually: (1) passion, (2) personalism, (3) paradox of soul, (4) community, (5) *romerías* (pilgrimages), (6) fiesta, (7) musical elán, and (8) family. (cf. de Luna 2006: 107; Villafañe 1993: 112–19). Finally, in the works of Orlando Espín and Virgilio Elizondo

we find that Christian spirituality among Latino/as has four major themes: (1) the centrality of the suffering Jesus, and Maria (Guadalupe); (2) a belief in Divine Providence; (3) hope amidst suffering; and (4) the importance of relationships (cf. de Luna 2006:107).

All these are true of Christian spirituality among Latino/as; however, in the work of Latino/a theologians I find seven spiritual classics that need further investigation and reflection by Latino/a spiritualogians: (1) *lo cotidiano*; (2) *mestizaje* (hybridity); (3) justice and liberation; (4) familia/community; (5) popular religion; (6) la Church, and 7) fiesta and suffering. In what follows I will briefly explain what I believe Latino/a theologians mean by each, recognizing that each needs further consideration.

Lo cotidiano

Lo cotidiano or *la cotidianidad*, with all its routine, its highs and lows, is divine; it is the place where God dwells and acts. For Latino/a theologians it is the locus theologicus. As Orlando Espín reminds us, “The Art of Spirituality is developed in the *cotidiano*. It is an art that needs to be practiced in the routine of life as well as in life’s special moments” (Espín 1997: 26).

Carmen Nanko-Fernández insists on God’s presence in the *cotidiano* being one that “reminds us of our obligations to each other ... [especially to] those vulnerable and struggling on the margins” (Nanko-Fernández 2007).

In my own reflection on the *cotidiano*, I have come to distinguish a subcategory, which I call *el cotidiano* disrupted and interrupted. Our *cotidiano*, especially when disrupted by bad or good news and events, is the place “where we experience the death and resurrection of Jesus in our *penas y dolores*, and *glorias y victorias*” (Cavazos-González 2011).

Mestizaje (hybridity)

Latino/as in the United States are not just a mix of Spanish, Amerindian, and African blood and cultures; we are also a blend of our or our ancestors’ Latin American culture of origin and generic US culture. We have been called a *raza cosmica* because of our *mestizaje*. Can this *mestizaje/hybridity* be a spiritual topos?

Biblical scholar and theologian Jean-Pierre Ruiz reminds us that Latino/a theologians are indebted to Virgilio Elizondo’s work on the Galilean Jesus, and that because of this “it is high time that we take a closer and more careful look at its hidden assumptions and at the unexamined implications of its discourse about *mestizaje*” (Ruiz 2011: Kindle location 740).

Mestizaje recalls the foundation of our Christian faith: “Jesus of Nazareth definitively reveals God to humankind – and not only reveals but *is himself* the revelation of God” (Espín 2006: 11). The spiritual theme of *mestizaje* takes seriously the incarnation of the Word made flesh, making Jesús a divine/human *mestizo*.

Justice and liberation

Latino/a theologians owe a debt of gratitude to Latin American liberation theologians and as a result the call for justice and liberation is essential to our theologies. Roberto Goizueta, speaking of the spirituality implicitly found in Orlando Espín's *Faith of the People*, calls it "una mística" that is not divorced from la lucha cotidiana for justice; it is a "resistance to vanquishment" (Goizueta 1997: xvi). Latino/a spirituality in the work of Espín and most Latina/o theologians "bridges the barriers which modern Western theologies have erected between spirituality and social justice, between both of these and the theological enterprise itself" ((Goizueta 1997: xvi).

Mujerista Ada María Isasi-Díaz, whose work on la lucha is her legacy to Latino/a theology, claims "Spirituality is our love for God that calls us to engage each other, to share ourselves with each other" (Isasi-Díaz 2004: 34). Without the lucha for justice and liberation there is no Christian spirituality.

Familia/community

Central to Latino/a spirituality and theology is la familia. It is la familia that raises and educates (forms) us and from which we receive our values and wisdom or our disvalues and ignorance. The family is not simply nuclear; it is the extended blood family and the extended family of comadres and compadres and amigo/as that gift us with a sense of community, and as Christians with an understanding of the communion of saints (Nanko-Fernández 2007).

Familismo is a core Latino/a value that influences our spiritualities, and it is "characterized by an enduring commitment and loyalty to immediate and extended family members" (Campeño and Schwartz 2006: 74). This loyalty extends to our devotion to Jesus, la Virgen María, and los santos y santas of our faith as it does to our deceased loved ones, who are never really far from our hearts and minds. Familismo demonstrates our "profound respect for the human person and [how we] value relationships over tasks or possessions. Personal relationships are at the heart of a spirituality of encuentro and the need to develop strong family, community, and parish ties" (Cavazos-González 2009b).

Popular religion

Latino theologians such as Roberto Goizueta, Virgilio Elizondo, and Orlando Espín invite Latina/o theologians to take seriously popular religion, especially popular Catholicism, as that which belongs to the people. It is the faith of the people, which is to say a true and living *sensus fidei* through which the Spirit of God acts and speaks to the universal Church.

Maureen Campesino's reading of Latina/o theologians leads her to claim that the origins of Hispanic popular religiosity are to be found in the Guadalupe event. Certainly Marian devotion is important to popular Catholicism but so is Christ crucified. The common expression "Cristo en la cruz y María en la luz" sums up the heart of Latino/a popular religión. Popular religión is a veritable spirituality that breathes and lives "relationality, family, fiesta, suffering, aesthetics, and its indigenous roots" (de Luna 2006: 107).

La Church

With the coming of German, Irish, and Italian bishops, priests, and religious men and women into what had been northern Mexico, la iglesia found itself ministered to by those who insisted it was now "the Church." While this may seem to simply a translation of the Spanish into English, we need to realize that la iglesia Latino/a found itself a conquered and vanquished people; it lost its native clergy and found itself misunderstood and on the fringes of the US Catholic Church. While some Latino/as chose to leave the Catholic Church and join an assortment of Protestant denominations, others simply moved into an increased participation in popular Catholicism, where the institutional Church is an instrument of popular religion's need for sacraments.

The sacraments point to a reality beyond themselves, to an already but not yet. Arturo Bañuelas, speaking about the work of Justo González, explains how la Church needs to be a mañana people because "*mañana* [is] at the heart of Hispanic spirituality" (Bañuelas 1992: 283). What is often criticized as a weakness in Latinidad is turned upside down by Justo González, who sees mañana as eschatological tension: "The church, he explains, must be a mañana people in pilgrimage to the reign of God. To live out a mañana spirituality is a call to a radical questioning of today, ... Mañana is already here, lived in the promise of God's faithfulness" (Bañuelas 1992: 283).

Fiesta and suffering

The seventh and final classic theme of Latino/a theology is that of fiesta and suffering, the highs and lows of our cotidiano. "In the midst of death and difficulties the Hispanic celebrates life. This is possible because most Hispanic fiestas are grounded in a profound spirituality" (Garcia 2000: 59). This is a spirituality that acknowledges a share in God's spirit. We recognize God's presence in our cotidiano, which is the gift of life. God's spirit is at play in the human longing to be whole, in the need for self-actualization. Fiesta in the midst of pain is sacramental; it points to the nostalgic longing for love, life, joy, peace, and wellbeing.

Fiesta, the celebration of life, does not deny the harsh realities in which many Latino/as find themselves. Still, it reflects hope in the midst of suffering; it affirms

that pain and death do not have the final say – rather life and fiesta are eternal in the eschatological hope of God's familia.

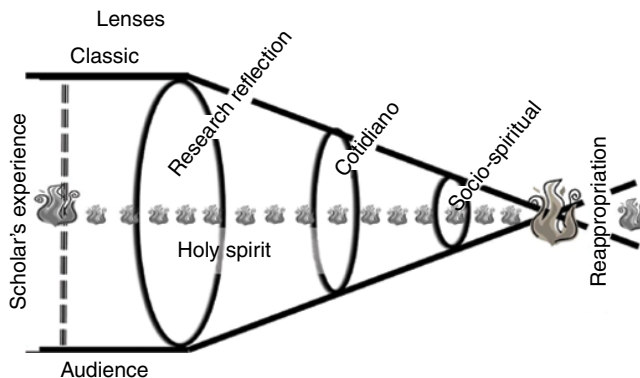
This and the other six classic themes I have mentioned point to spirituality among Latino/as and require further research and reflection by Latino/a spiritualogians.

The Socio-spiritual Method

I identify myself as a Latino spiritualogian, not a spiritual theologian, and as such I research and study the existential and communal reality called spirituality. My preferred method for doing so is one that I have been developing since 1997 when I was a doctoral student. I call it the socio-spiritual method. It proposes to seek the cotidiano, as well the theological sources of the Christian spiritual classics. At the same time it seeks to determine the social and sociological implications of those classics for the evangelical growth of the faithful Christian.

A number of doctor of ministry students at the Catholic Theological Union are now using the socio-spiritual method for their work. En conjunto we have diagrammed the method in order to help them bring the spiritual classic to their intended audience. These components bring the spiritual classic together with a contemporary intended audience for whom the spiritualogian is reappropriating the classic in a formational (spiritual and social) praxis. This work depends on three lenses, used to contemplate the spirituality being studied. These are (1) academic research and prayerful reflection; (2) lo cotidiano as the place where God acts; and (3) the socio-spiritual implications of the Gospel message. The socio-spiritual method for the study of Christian spiritualities is meant to be a self-implicating interdisciplinary endeavor. It never loses sight of the cotidiano as locus theologicus or the socio-spiritual implications of Jesus' Gospel.

The study of Christian spirituality often relies on studying a spiritual classic as the source for theology and inspiration. As you can see from my list of the seven



spiritual classics of Latino/a theology, I do not limit the spiritual classic to ancient spiritual texts. Spiritualogians recognize that architecture, art work, saints, religious communities, pious movements, devotional practices, music, drama, theological themes, and other expressions of the human soul (mind, heart, and gut) can be studied as spiritual classics.

A spiritual classic (text or theme) breaks free of temporal and cultural boundaries, reaching out to touch people of different centuries, cultures, and even religious persuasions. I believe the seven spiritual classic themes of Latino/a theology do just that, as they can be found in a variety of Christian theologies.

Latino/a theologians and their communities, as well as their readers, are immersed in a common religious, cultural, and social process, which forms the Christian imagination that informs their *cotidiano*. I call this the pearl of great price; for Jesus this hidden treasure was God's Reign. He spent his life encouraging others to convert and give themselves to that Reign. His was a call to a socio-spiritual conversion that changed the believer's way of relating to family, friends, and society as well as their way of being spiritual, transcending themselves to God and neighbor.

Like the spiritual masters of our past, Latino/a theologians write to provoke change in the lives of their readers, and they have a specific social understanding at work in the hoped-for outcome of their writing. The spiritualogian needs to discover the Christian imagination and social imagination, which is the pearl of great price underlying the Latino or Latina theologian or the classic theme they are studying. The message of any traditional or contemporary spiritual theme is socially, culturally, and religiously determined by its *cotidiano*, and has socio-implications for the spiritual life of both individuals and communities that identify with a particular spirituality.

The socio-spiritual method is a hermeneutical, appropriate, and practical method used in the systematic study of the spiritual classics. Guided by the Holy Spirit, it seeks to appropriate their transformative message for a contemporary audience by promoting the socio-implicating values of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I firmly believe that the Holy Spirit that inspired the spiritual masters and movements of our Christian Tradition is the same Spirit that has traditioned their doctrines and practices from generation to generation and is the same Spirit that guides our study of them.

The efforts of the spiritualogian are to discover the Christian imagination, social imagination, and principal explicit intention of the classic text or theme. This requires academic research with the help of various disciplines (history, cultural studies, sociology, theology, religious studies, psychology, art, political sciences, and so on) that can help determine the spiritual master's social imagination. It also needs an educated familiarity with the socio-religious reality and *cotidiano* of the spiritual classic, for the original audience as well as the intended contemporary audience.

These efforts are found in the five methodological components that govern the spiritualogian's work:

1. **consideration** of the common ground shared by the spiritual master, original audience, spiritualogian, and the contemporary audience;

2. **recognition** of the spiritualogian's limitations in knowing and understanding the spiritual master and original audience's social imagination and cotidianidad;
3. **discovery** of the religious systems, cultural values, psycho-spiritual inclinations, and social imagination of the spiritual masters within the text;
4. **awareness** of the work of the holy spirit in the life of the spiritual master, the original audience, the contemporary spiritualogian, and the contemporary audience; and
5. **reappropriation** of the spiritual master's principal explicit intention for a contemporary audience, helping the classic to provoke action and modification in the social and spiritual life of the contemporary reader.

Conclusion

As a Latino spiritualogian, I understand that there are five ways to speak about spirituality, and I have considered these in the writings of Latino and Latina theologians. For the most part, however, I have focused my work on the scientific understanding of spirituality, which is spirituality studies. And so I have divided this chapter into a consideration of spirituality and its study in general, a look at what Latino/a theologians have to say explicitly and implicitly about spirituality, an invitation to consider the classic themes of Latino/a theology as classic themes for the study of spirituality among Latina/os, and finally the offer of a socio-spiritual method for the study of spirituality.

In closing, I need to affirm that while I value socio-implication in the study of the spiritual classics, we need to remember that spirituality "is not just a social or an anthropological reality; it is the work of the Holy Spirit in the cotidiano of the believer" (Cavazos-González 2008).

Notes

- 1 Spiritualogians are theologians who specialize in the field of spirituality studies, as distinct from theologians of spirituality, who work in the field of spiritual theology; cf. Cavazos-González (2008).
- 2 *Editor's note:* As the reader may know, *tío* is the Spanish for "uncle," and *tía* is the Spanish for "aunt." The author is here playing with the phonetics of the words in Spanish and English ("theologians") and suggesting an "extended-family-like" relation among colleagues in Latino/a theology.
- 3 Speaking of *spirituality among Latino/as* rather than *Latino/a spirituality* recognizes there is no one Latina/o spirituality but rather there are a multiplicity of spiritualities among Latino/as. Cf. Campesino and Schwartz (2006).
- 4 The letter reads: "Thanks to grace, o worthy and beloved brother, any reason for tears has been taken from you, therefore act, guard yourself, run, hurry. *Act in such a way as to grow in*

spirituality. Take care not to lose through imprudence and negligence the good you have received. . . . While we still have time, we sow in the Spirit so as to gather a harvest of spiritual things." Cf. Secondin (1997: 31). The translation of the Italian text is mine.

- 5 For more information on the history of "spirituality" in Christianity see Perrin (2007: Kindle location 755–26–31).

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CHAPTER 24

Latina/o Practical Theology

Reflections on Faith-Based Organizing as a Religious Practice

Altagracia Pérez

Discussions of religious practices are not only centered on the pious and prayerful acts of people of faith at worship: in Christian tradition, people of faith have acted against injustice, have stood in solidarity with the oppressed and the suffering, and this practice stemmed from and nurtured their life of faith. In the Latino community, Christian congregations throughout the United States are working to address the injustices and the causes of suffering in their communities through faith-based organizing. This ministry, and its spiritual strategies, is important to the field of practical theology, as it seeks to study the work of the church that is transforming the world.

Since the early 1990s I have ministered in urban communities where Latina/o Christians, together with their African American, Asian, and Anglo neighbors and co-workers, fellow congregants, and friends, have prayed, protested, and marched for justice and change in their communities. They have used the spiritual practices of fasting, testifying/witnessing, offering comfort and strength, prayer, and anointing to leverage the strength to create change in situations that many thought hopeless.

I will discuss the role of faith-based organizing in providing a medium for ministry both within the congregation and in the wider community. Through this ministry the faithful utilize spiritual tools and resources to work for justice and to participate in a process of healing that makes the congregation and its surrounding community more whole. More study of this ministry in Latina/o congregations and communities will provide important insights into leadership development, congregational development, and the processes of evangelism, faith formation, and pastoral care. It will highlight the strengths of these communities, which often are only described by their weaknesses and deficits. In the midst of much injustice, there is a vital ministry of renewal and healing

that can inspire and inform the ministries of other congregations seeking to be faithful to their mission in difficult contexts.

Practical Theology in Latino Contexts: A Tool for Transformation

The changes and shifts in practical theology, traditionally understood in the past as the study of the “practical” arts employed by clergy engaged in ministry, have led to a broader and more robust field, better equipped to reflect and resource the complexities inherent in ministry today. The understanding of practical theology as a discipline has evolved over the last hundred years, building on its concerns rooted in the life and ministry of the church as the people of God. The practices of the church, its mission and ministry of healing and transformation, for the faithful and, through their ministry, for the world, are the subject under investigation and exploration in practical theology.

The assumption that theory, or in this case theology, created in the lofty towers of the academy is then offered and applied in the field to the ministries of the church presumes a distinction that does not exist. The practice of churches is theory-laden. Theory is not distinct from practice (Browning 1996: 6). Congregational life, the life and practice of people of faith and of leaders of religious communities, is the substance of the study of practical theology. Reflection and study of these contexts, situations, and processes in turn provide insights into the life of faith, the functioning of congregations, and the work of the church in the world (Osmer 2008: ix–x).

Working definitions of practical theology as an interdisciplinary field concerned with the practices of people of faith or the impact of faith on the practices of people are varied. For the purpose of this current discussion, the characteristics highlighted by John Reader are useful. Engaging the work of Woodward and Pattison (2000), he emphasizes that practical theology is transformational, unsystematic, socio-politically aware, committed to social and political change of unjust situations, and interdisciplinary. As transformational work, it seeks to change human situations concretely and to impact the understanding of the world from a Christian perspective. In seeking to be responsive in contexts of rapid change and constant flux, it is flexible, as it stays engaged with current socio-political circumstances in order to impact them in life-giving ways, reducing unnecessary suffering and death. In doing this it is in dialogue with the social sciences and other disciplines that can shed light on the reality being studied (Reader 2008: 7–8). It is a rigorous field, which takes seriously God’s action in the world through the body of Christ that is the church, the people of God.

This presumes that the context and culture of people of faith are central in understanding the role and power of religious institutions and belief in the world, especially as agents of change. This is important for people of faith, but it is also important for all those, religiously affiliated or not, who are concerned with the work of justice. As the complexities of globalization and its often dehumanizing impact on the lives of people are recognized, especially as it impacts those least valued by dominant, hegemonic

forces and systems, alliances among those working for justice are crucial. The power of the grassroots is the power of relational alliances working together to resist and transform injustice in the complex and interrelated forms it takes when impacting communities.

The web of human community is necessary to sustain the efforts needed for change and transformation. It is this living human web that is the subject of practical theology. As identified by Miller-McLemore in her reflection on the changes in perspective needed in pastoral theology, “public policy issues that determine the health of the human web are as important as issues of individual emotional well-being” (Miller-McLemore 1993). Not only are issues and responses identified in community and between communities of support and ministry, but communities are also the site of epistemological insights that contribute to the healing and transformational work identified by the church as its mission. Faith communities are diverse, each with its own history, experience, and knowledge, and their voices must continue to be engaged. Although this has improved, there continues to be a need to engage voices traditionally marginalized by the academy, especially because they are on the front lines of the fight for human dignity and justice. The work of practical theology as an interdisciplinary study of the practices of people and communities of faith engaged in transformational work becomes another tool for change and resistance, as alliances are made between organizations of all types committed to the same project: worker justice organizations, civil rights organizations, community-based social justice/service organizations, and social, civic, and interfaith organizations.

Among the communities engaged in this struggle for justice are Latina/o communities, and particularly Latina/o communities of faith. The difficulties presented by this ethnic designation (sometimes incorrectly identified as a racial designation as well) has been discussed by many who offer theologies identified alternatively and at the same time as Latina/Latino, Hispana/Hispano, and Hispanic.¹ The diversity of cultures, languages, history, socioeconomic realities, and religious beliefs and practices that are enveloped in this term is so vast as to make the category almost useless. There are, however, important characteristics that are shared, and that make the current reality of being identified as “a” community useful for the project of liberation and transformation that is the mission of the church. The very complex and multicultural, multiracial nature of cultures that identify as Latina/o offer important contributions to theology and epistemology, in turn contributing to the tools and strategies available for resistance and social transformation.

Latinas/os in the United States come from many different countries that make up Latin America and the Caribbean. They share a history of colonial rule by Spanish and Portuguese explorers and conquerors who sought to exploit and abridge their lands, gold, and natural resources. The post colonial, neocolonial, and colonial legacies (in the case of Puerto Rico’s relationship with the United States) have led to continued violence, exploitation, and injustice for people, mostly Spanish-speaking, who have made their way “north” to find a better life, only to find discrimination, exploitation, and poverty. This shared history and experience, along with the similar ways in which

Amerindian, African, and Iberian cultures engaged and influenced each other, can be a unifying perspective (Agosto 2009: 78).

This shared history leads to a shared experience. The prejudice and ensuing discrimination have deep roots in US dominant culture and history. The mixed, multi-cultural, miscegenic nature of this community targets it for victimization. Segovia eloquently summarizes the conflict of “our socio cultural past in a world where mixture is regarded as highly problematic and indeed offensive. We are a hybrid people, with biological and/or cultural miscegenation at our very core” (Segovia 2005: 62). A cultural identity as a Latina/o is one that is marked by internal difference and otherness. As immigrants this is further complicated.² The process of adjusting to a new cultural context, adjusting to a new lifestyle, means change, and this change creates a wedge, separating one from one’s country of origin. The bicultural experience is alienating because one is no longer seen as a part of the country of origin, and one is not fully accepted in the new country either (Segovia 2005: 58). These are the enduring markers of people identified as Latinos/as across generations, especially in the southwestern United States, creating aliens out of people who are actually on their native lands.

This experience and the perspective it informs can, however, serve as a lens that is an asset in the work of liberation. The complexities of these issues of identity have been discussed by theologians as potential locations for liberative work in Latina/o contexts. Mayra Rivera sees these complex understandings as more than descriptors, indeed as “theoretical contributions toward the development of alternative ideals of identity-in-relation that may promote more equitable social relations” (Rivera 2009: 33). Segovia too sees the diasporic reality as providing important material for creating relationships across lines of difference, understanding and sharing the experience of otherness with others committed to the work of justice. “Thus the voice of our otherness becomes a voice of and for liberation: not afraid to expose, critique, and provide an alternative vision and narrative; grounded in mixture as something not to be eschewed and marginalized but valued and engaged and committed to the fundamental principles of freedom and justice” (Segovia 2005: 62). In the words of Néstor Medina, the diversity among Latinas/os is not a weakness but strength, a power to be subversive and disruptive of oppressive systems, reflecting the possibilities that exist for “constructing a more human reality” (Medina 2009: 141).

Given the identity, history, and context of the Latina/o community, the practices and ministries of Latina/o people and their communities of faith become important for those committed to the transformation of society. The diversity of these communities of faith – religious tradition/denominational affiliation, language differences, generational differences, socioeconomic differences, cultural differences – offers an opportunity to explore issues and strategies that can inform a variety of contexts, especially in urban contexts, where diversity, mobility, and resilience are traits shared by several communities living in cities. Those committed to learning from the strategies and experiences of people of faith, in order to equip those committed to working for change, would do well to learn from practical theology in Latina/o contexts.

Some Insights of Practical Theology in Latina/o Communities

Latina/o theologians identify their project as contextualized. It is about and for “community struggles for life and construction of a better world, and against injustice, marginalization, and the assimilatory forces in the dominant Anglo-European culture” (Medina 2009: 139). Theology in this community has points of resonance, implications for others “attempting to name their identities and describe their faith experiences” (Medina 2009: 139). This emphasis on context has meant that there are shared themes in Latina/o theology, religious traditions and practices notwithstanding. Some of these cultural values and expressions, such as a recognition of the sacred in the everyday; the importance and sacredness of life, and its reflection in providing care, protection, advocacy, and fighting for justice; the centrality of relationships and community; and the belief in God’s personal care are reflected in the lives of Christians of all stripes: Roman Catholic, Protestant, Evangelicas/os, and Pentecostals.³ These themes are studied with regard to the Latina/o community’s popular religious practices (Espín 1997), prayer, personal devotional life, worship, and ministries within and outside the congregational setting (Conde-Frazier 1997). Leadership is an important theme for both practical theology and those writing and ministering with, to, and for the Latina/o community.

Discussion of issues of leadership range from the characteristics of leadership valued by the Latina/o community, and those that deter the flourishing of the community, to discussions of continual need to develop indigenous leadership equipped to serve this growing community. Leadership is not confined to traditional definitions of church leadership with its emphasis on clerical or ordained and professionalized leadership. In each context, there is identified the importance of the leadership of the laity, and a recognition of the important work done by women leaders, who are not often officially recognized as such in various congregational structures. Two important characteristics of leadership in the church are integrity and service, which are seen as reflecting the character of Christ’s ministry.

Leadership for the Latina/o Church

Zaida Maldonado Pérez in her essay “Leadership in the Latina/o Community” reviews the results of the study conducted by the National Committee for Latino Leadership entitled “Reflecting an American Vista: The Character and Impact of Latino Leadership” (Maldonado Pérez 2005). The main characteristics sought in a leader by Latinas/os can be summarized as “the four C’s of Latino Leadership:” character, competence, compassion, and community service (Maldonado Pérez 2005: 125). The importance of character and passion as well as capacity to serve and to be responsible is reflected in other discussions of leadership. These characteristics are present in the leadership sought by believers in parishes, and their lack is seen as contributing to the exodus of Roman Catholics from the church to churches with leaders that reflect these cultural

values, primarily because the leadership is indigenous (Deck 2004: 287–9). These are also reflected in the often unrecognized, dismissed, or undervalued congregational leadership of women, who take on often controversial leadership because of a sense of call that comes from a desire to respond to Christ's call with integrity, walking the talk. For these women, "the will of God, holy living, and Christian service are synonymous" (Conde-Frazier 1997: 133–4). This definition of Christian leadership challenges traditional expectations that the Latina/o community is most comfortable with leadership in the style of "Caciques" and "Caudillos." Styles where a "chief" or a "troop commander," a person who commands authority because of his office, may be traditional, but the characteristics most valued and seen as a sign of charisma, possessing a gift from God for leadership, do not follow this model of leadership. Some Bible Institutes, institutions with more flexible and responsive structures, better able to address the leadership development needs of the Latina/o community, recognize the importance of character, integrity, and competence, and some are moving to formally reflect these values in their curriculum (Conde-Frazier 2005).

These styles and expectations of leadership are widely shared in other cultural contexts. Transformational and servant leadership are seen as the most effective in non-profit organizations where mission and integrity are required assets to navigate primarily volunteer institutions successfully.⁴ In the church, this ministry is shared by both the laity and clergy. This is grounded in the scriptural understanding of the "priesthood of all believers" and is also pragmatic, given both the amount of work that needs to be done and the limited resources available to sustain professional paid positions in the church. Yet it is a continuing challenge to identify, prepare, and sustain church leadership. It is critical, then, to identify, utilize, and modify, when necessary, leadership development models that build from the grassroots, connect with people's passions, and allow people to gain competency and experience while serving the community. Faith-based community organizing provides a leadership development model that has effectively developed congregational leaders for ministry. For many people of faith it is the way they engage in ministry on behalf of their congregation and their community. It is a concrete practice of the see–judge–act circle of pastoral reflection.⁵ It assumes that the community has knowledge that can be resourced and expanded to solve the problems that the community is facing. It builds on the strengths, the assets of congregations. The community is strengthened through the experience of successfully responding to death-dealing issues in the name of a God who has defeated death and promises new life.

Faith-Based Community Organizing and its role in Latina/o Congregations/Communities

Faith-based organizing is a form of community organizing with roots in the organizing work of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) in Chicago, and the organizing methodology of Saul Alinsky.⁶ The church institutionally supported the organizing of workers

from the beginning, but the shift from the workplace to the community as the focus of organizing brought the church to the center of the organizing project. The work of the IAF, Communities Organized for Public Service (COPS), People Improving Communities through Organizing (PICO), the Gamaliel Foundation, and younger organizations such as Interfaith Worker Justice (IWJ) and Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE) is specifically to identify and develop religious leaders who can mobilize their communities to address the situations in their communities that require change.⁷ The issues identified were those that were impacting the quality of life of the community: schools, city services, violence, pollution, and food deserts.

The process of leadership development employed by faith-based organizing efforts directly corresponds to the four C's of leadership identified earlier. Character, competence, compassion, and community service are the characteristics sought and developed in leaders in faith-based organizing. Potential leaders are identified because of their role in their congregations. In conversation with clergy and other congregational leaders, people are identified who have a history of service and advocacy, who are respected and sought out for advice and assistance, and who are interested in working to make change in the community. These people have already shown the leadership characteristics that are most valued in Latina/o communities. Many of the congregations and communities involved in this faith-based organizing are Latina/o. These leaders are strengthened and developed through formal and informal training opportunities. They start by building on the relationships and networks they are already a part of, strengthening these bonds while listening to the concerns and hopes of the community, and connecting them to the goal of building power that can affect the change they desire. Training helps leaders map the landscape, identifying potential allies and the networks that need to be targeted to create the leverage necessary to have those with the power respond to the needs of the community. The networks depend upon relationships and a shared vision for what is possible in their community.

The end result of this work has been the development of leaders who develop personally and within their respective congregations. They also produce results that improve the quality of life for their communities. As they seek to increase the involvement of members of their congregations in the organizing work, and as they seek to engage community members in the organizing work their congregations are involved in, they share the theological underpinnings of their work. They understand that what they are doing is responding to the real needs of their congregation and community in the name of God, and the spiritual tools of their traditions inform and strengthen their organizing efforts. This model, like the Latin American base-community model, provides opportunities for reflection on the actions taken, to learn from the experience, to deepen the analysis, and to strengthen the grounding on which this work is undertaken. In some parishes the groups engaged in community action actually identify themselves as *comunidades de base*. Biblical stories and images are used in reflection and in articulating the significance of the actions being taken. Spiritual practices of prayer and fasting are employed to

strengthen the resolve of the leaders, and to “testify” to the wider community the importance of the issue and the sacrifices that leaders are willing to make to resolve it. The religious leaders in the Los Angeles area, working for economic justice together as part of CLUE, spoke out in the middle of the Santa Monica Farmers’ Market, as Prophets in the Marketplace, dressed in religious/liturgical garb, and reading from their scriptures those passages that admonished against mistreating the worker, the foreigner, the orphan, and the widow. Religious practices common among Latinas/os are utilized to express the motivations and the purposes of the actions taken to seek justice on behalf of the community. Processions, *posadas*, fasts, prayer vigils, healing and worship services, preaching, anointing, and commissioning workers all become part of the spiritual tool kit brought to bear against economic injustice. These are all examples of cultural action for freedom, where spiritual and religious traditions and practices serve to transform the community (Freire 2000).

The impact is at multiple levels, including the life of the church. These organizing efforts have transformed the leaders, the communities, and the lives of the workers. The workers have benefitted from the victories directly, strengthening their labor organizations, and gaining card check neutrality, union representation in the workplace, better contracts, and better wages and benefits. The communities have been stabilized through the stabilization of the working families that live in them. The alliances and coalitions that have been developed to respond to worker issues have gone on to address other issues in the community, bringing much-needed change and resources to their communities.⁸ The churches have been revitalized as an important link has been re-established between them and their communities. Church leaders have ministered to community members that might not normally participate in their congregations, while lay people have had their leadership skills developed, which then transfer to their church work as well as other areas of their lives.⁹ The revitalization of the congregation in turn strengthens this community institution, which continues to provide important services where often there are few long-term, stable institutions.

A word about the alliances built between communities and networks: the ever-increasing diversity of communities requires working with people who differ in race, ethnicity, class, and religious tradition. This is difficult and takes time, as relationships of trust and mutual respect are built over time. The shared mission of leveraging power to change conditions in the community makes the alliances possible. Relationship building – the sharing of experiences of oppression and struggle, as well as a sharing of the resources of faith and community that make it possible to persevere and even overcome these experiences – is a central part of the leadership training process. In this training, the mapping of the systems that impact on the lives of the communities seeking change also makes possible a deeper understanding of the strategies that are needed to overcome and change the systems that are oppressing the community. This understanding, however, could be deepened by sharing the history and experience of Latina/o people, the systems at play in the very formation of the community’s identity. The complex historical forces of imperialism, colonialism, racism, genocide, and co-optation that have impacted the peoples that now share the Latina/o identity are shared

by several communities of color, and are often not known. It is common in the African American community to integrate the history of the emancipation and civil rights movements as a part of the stories of faith that undergird the continuing struggles for justice. The connection between the history of struggle, survival, and new life of Latinas/os is not often integrated as a part of the story of faith. This disconnection from a history of struggle and change deprives the Latina/o community of an important resource for their perseverance and struggle, and also for important points of commonality with other communities of color with whom alliances are essential to increase power for leverage.

Empowerment as Evangelism and Faith Formation

The outreach that is required to expand the base of leaders and engaged participants when conducted by faith-based organizations and congregations is a model of evangelism and faith formation. Leaders on a campaign must reach out to fellow church members who are less active, and to their extended family, friends, and neighbors. The process of identifying potential participants (often called targets) and mapping out their networks requires visits in which leaders articulate their understanding of the problem and their passion behind addressing it. Often this is couched in theological terms and the sharing of the stories is very much a sharing of their journey; it is their “testimony and witness.”

These visits and encounters, while sharing the story of the leader, are primarily meant to be opportunities to listen to the stories and dreams of the members of the wider community. Questions are posed that seek to identify problems and challenges in the community that need to be addressed, and also to elicit from the “target” experiences in their lives when wrongs were addressed, they joined a group that sought to address wrongs, or any other examples in their own life experience of seeing God at work through them and their community. These are meant to identify what will motivate these persons to join the campaign or the project at hand, building on their past experience and their passion and frustrations. The organizer-leader then seeks to make the connections between the experiences and dreams of the target and the goals and strategies of the campaign.¹⁰

In faith-based organizing, the language that is used to convey the campaign and the reasons for participating is that of faith. Here again, biblical stories are employed and the connection is made between vision of the beloved community and the work being undertaken by the congregation on behalf of its community. Scripture is also used to explain the reasons why this kind of activity is appropriate and important to the mission of the church. Responding to the “least of these” and addressing the needs of the “hungry, and the naked” is faithfully continuing the servant ministry of Jesus. The taking of risks to bring new life to the community is possible because, in the Christian tradition, Jesus’ suffering brought new life to the community of faith.

Participating in small groups to plan events, to strategize about actions for change, and to share and learn from each other's experience of reaching out to the community is a form of faith formation. This time of reflection and sharing, as part of the see-judge-act pastoral circle, supports faith development. The learning is not catechetical, nor is it Bible study to reinforce doctrinal or theological teachings. It is a faith formation utilizing a critical model of education, which affirms that the learner has life experiences that inform their life of faith, and exploring it with others, especially in the context of the concrete issues of their personal and community lives. The organizer serves as the problem poser, and the contradictions, injustices, and difficulties of life are reflected upon to inform future action for the community. The faith journey and the tools and resources of the faith tradition are then brought to bear upon the reality of their lives, applying tenets of faith to the challenge of daily living.

Empowerment as Pastoral Care

Faith-based organizing is built on the strength of the leadership of any campaign. Those identified as leaders are people who can share their experiences of facing challenges and overcoming them through the use of personal and communal spiritual resources. This foundation is then built upon. Much time is spent practicing one's "pitch," the stories and important points of the campaign that will be shared with those one is seeking to engage in the campaign or in the planning committee. The organizer works with potential leaders, providing feedback on their approach and style (Warren 2001: 213–26). After meeting one on one with prospective leaders, these visits are debriefed to learn from the experience. This type of training can be described as a mentoring process of leadership development. It is intense, relational, and one on one, although some training does happen in groups. It uses as its primary material the relationship of trust, experiences both past and present, and processing and discussion, all of which are also a model of how to mentor another leader (Diaz-Bolet 2005: 203–5).

In working with others, leaders are trained to access their personal experiences of feeling challenged, afraid, and/or threatened in order to come to others they are seeking to organize from a place of compassion. Organizers are similarly challenged, reminded that they cannot ask their leaders to take risks if they themselves are not confronting their own fears. I personally counseled a young organizer who came seeking support for taking a step that she had put off for many years. She had suffered abuse at the hands of a close relative, and she had never confronted him. She decided that the next step in her growth was to confront her abuser. She was clear that this was required of her because she was asking her leaders to take risks confronting abusive husbands and managers, and that she could not in good conscience ask them to do what she would not do herself. She had carried this burden for decades and had now scheduled a time to take this big step, risking what it might do to her family relationships, which were not only emotionally but practically important to her wellbeing.

After confronting him she was transformed. She seemed to have shed overnight an anxious demeanor, and with confidence went on to successfully organize her group of leaders. When she met with me to reflect on the experience, she said she had not realized how she had been burdened by this experience, and had always thought of herself as a strong survivor. But after confronting her abuser, she was able to hear his apology knowing that what was most important was her facing him, and not cowering in fear. She felt a release that made her free and profoundly joyful. These leaders are ministering in the tradition of the wounded healer (Nouwen 1972), connecting with their places of brokenness to be available to others in a deeper way, knowing that both are healed, renewed, and strengthened not because of their own strength alone but because of God working through their brokenness, their weaknesses (2 Corinthians 12:9–10). “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comfort us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God” (2 Corinthians 1:3–4).

Conclusions

The field of practical theology, which seeks to study and learn from the practices of people of faith and the impact that these practices have in the transformation of society, has much material in the ministry of Latina/o people engaged in faith-based organizing. Faith-based organizing is a vital ministry that is renewing people’s lives and the congregations as they engage in service that positively impacts their communities. Latina/o communities are building on their traditions, history, and culture to address issues that immediately impact their quality of life. This provides a perspective that emphasizes the resilience and perseverance of people struggling for justice, often against great odds. Through relationships and networks they are able to leverage power for change, using the traditions of their faith to sustain and inform their action. These are powerful and hopeful testimonies that can encourage and inform the work of others seeking justice.

Notes

- 1 For two good discussions of the cultural/ethnic identification of Latinas/os see Segovia (2005: 58–60) and Espín (2005: 100–2).
- 2 For a good summary description of the experience of immigration see Conde-Frazier (2005: 187–8).
- 3 These themes are discussed by Latina/o theologians describing the context of their reflections and writings. For a good discussion of Latina/o theology in the US and its themes and scope see Espín (2005).
- 4 For several good articles on the challenges of non-profit leadership and characteristics of effective and inspiring leadership, see Riggio and Orr (2004).

- 5 This liberative model of theological reflection is used in many different contexts. Issues are identified from the context of the participants, and in discussion possible responses and solutions are discussed, then action is taken to address the issue. After action has been taken the group comes together to reflect on the outcome of the action and engage the reflection cycle again. For a good description of this process, see Holland and Henriot (1983).
- 6 For a summary of the history of the IAF and the work of Saul Alinsky see their website, <http://www.industrialareasfoundation.org/content/history>.
- 7 For a description of these organizations' history, development, and organizing strategy and methodology, see Warren (2001), Wood(2002), and Fischer (1994).
- 8 For example, the Coalition for a Better Inglewood participated in city development discussions after the successful campaign to stop Wal-Mart's Ballot Initiative.
- 9 For a good description of a leadership development model that utilizes self-interest to motivate leaders and to build on the strengths and hopes of leaders, see Warren (2001: 213–22).
- 10 This training model is used by many community organizers and this specific organizing process for economic justice is summarized in two organizing manuals shared by Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE), CLUE, and Local 11: "Introduction to Organizing" and "Organizer Handbook." These are internal documents, unpublished, which were shared with me very generously by the LAANE staff. The willingness of LAANE to open its collection and archives made this chapter possible, and I am very grateful for their support of this project. These strategies are also discussed in the books about faith-based organizing already cited: Warren (2001) and Fischer (1994).

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CHAPTER 25

Latino/a Religion and Politics

Elieser Valentín

“**R**eligion and politics are intertwined in the foundations of our civilization.” With that statement Ronald Stone began his 2012 tome on the theological and political thought of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich. This very fact – the intersection of religion and politics as a customary conversation partner--can be seen particularly within the United States. The annals of U.S. American history manifest the effect of religiosity (mostly Christian) within its own public discourse. In fact, as the late Jean Bethke-Elshtain noted, “American politics is indecipherable if it is severed from the interplay and panoply of America’s religions” (Dionne, Elshtain, and Drogosz 2004: 94). Thus, political decisions, mobilization on a myriad of public issues, and judicial decrees have all been made under the influence of religious modes of interpretations. For instance, in the twenty-first century, we can note that religion continues to play a critical role in presidential elections. The election and re-election of President Barack Obama are a contemporary illustration of this. His 2008 primary victory in many ways hinged on how he handled the controversy surrounding his former pastor Jeremiah Wright (a United Church of Christ minister), not to mention the need of his surrogates to prove that Obama was not a Muslim. Even before him, George W. Bush made his own religious sensibilities a centerpiece of his presidential ambitions. In many ways, “compassionate conservatism” was premised on his interpretation of Christianity and its heritage of care for the weak and the vulnerable of society.

Latin@s in the US likewise have been a people driven by their respective religious histories and practices. These in turn have impacted the way Latin@s understand and engage the political sphere. It is not surprising to find heated exchanges among Latin@s on issues relating to religious and political views. In fact, it is often said that religion and politics are two topics that should never be discussed around the Latin@ dinner table.

The 2013 conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute notes that about 90 percent of Latin@s in the US hold some type of religious belief. The number of Latin@s that claim no religious affiliation has increased to about 12 percent, a significant jump from just a number of years ago. But this survey also shows that most Latin@s remain religious and many (32 percent) are faithful followers of their respective religious traditions (Public Religion Research Institute 2013). Few surveys, however, have explored political engagement among Latin@s, although political party affiliation has been measured among registered voters. Politics is a consistent topic of conversation among Latin@s, in large part because of the implications of political dialogue and decision-making among political representatives for *lo cotidiano*.

Many national issues have served as impetus for broader participation in the public sphere and have mobilized Latin@s to form broad coalitions. Faith leaders have been directly immersed in political conversations and some have run for political office, including, in New York City, Pentecostal ministers Ruben Diaz and Fernando Cabrera. Yet the high level of interest in politics in Latin@ circles has not translated into direct and consistent electoral participation. The aforementioned survey found that “Among the nearly two-thirds (67%) of Hispanic adults who are U.S. citizens, 59% are currently registered to vote” (Public Religion Research Institute Survey 2013: 5). In the 2012 elections, Latin@s accounted for 8 percent of the entire US electorate. While the number of Latin@s that vote has increased over the last few election cycles, the level of voting participation has contributed to the disempowerment of Latin@s within national and local political, economic, social, and cultural realms.

Because Latin@s take their politics seriously (though not particularly so at the ballot box), I am perplexed at the lack of attention given by religious scholars to the academic field of *Latin@* religion and politics. Many social scientists have produced monographs and articles on the topic, but there has been a lacuna in extrapolating the religious and theological underpinnings of political thought and practice among Latin@s. One of the few texts that moves in this direction is *Latino Religions and Civic Activism in the United States*, a project edited by Gaston Espinosa, Virgilio Elizondo, and Jesse Miranda (2005). That is not to say that political thought is not implied in much of the work found in Latin@ theology. I would suggest that because Latin@ theology is a distinctive mode of liberation theology, the discourse emanating from Latin@ theologians and religious scholars does in fact show glimpses of intentional political analysis. The fact remains that the contextual reality of Latin@s (threats against our culture, overt ethnic and racial bigotry, economic exploitation) demands political analysis as an intrinsic interlocutor in doing theology. Few, however, have reflected critically and deliberately on the interplay between religion and politics among Latin@s in the US.

This chapter highlights some of the scholarly work that addresses religiosity and politics from a Latin@ perspective. The first part of this chapter notes three distinct paradigms by which to review scholarship in Latin@ religion and politics. They are:

1. a focus on specific issues which affect and directly impact Latin@s in the US. Scholarship here has focused primarily on immigration as a key mode of discourse.

2. a focus on voting patterns of Latin@s in US national elections. Such scholarship typically focuses only distantly on electoral politics.
3. a more recent focus on Latin@ faith-based organizations (FBOs). Catherine Wilson's *The Politics of Latino Faith* (2008) is a key source for an understanding of this modality.

The second part of this chapter will offer some constructive proposals that address the aforementioned paradigms.

A Look into Latin@ Religion and Politics

Immigration in Latin@ religion and politics

The recent book *Religion and Politics in America's Borderlands* (Azaransky 2013) is undoubtedly one of the most significant works to explore immigration as a political and religious reality. On the basis of a conference on immigration and theology, Sarah Azaransky gathered several key scholars to examine immigration from a historical, political, social, and theological perspective. A key significance of the book is that it "engages these political and religious realities through critical analysis about how religious commitments are displayed, professed, and embodied in experiences of immigration and in life at the border and in the borderlands. It investigates how these commitments shape patterns of everyday living, including economic, political, and racial perceptions" (Azaransky 2013: 2). Orlando Espín, in his contribution to the collection, points to the "political" underpinnings of the immigration issue, which represents a national crisis that affects a vast amount of Latin@ families. Espín writes:

if we debate the issue of immigration (as immigration is usually understood today), it is because another decision preceded it, the decision to establish and recognize a border. Any border (our local southern California border, the one with Canada, and every other border between nations anywhere else) is an imaginary, human creation. Creation did not come packaged with borders. Earth did not evolve with borders. Human decisions made a few rivers and a few mountains into "borders," and in other cases (as in our local San Diego case) human decisions made an imaginary line into a border . . . borders are established by decisions made by a handful of humans who have the power to make those decisions and to claim authority to defend them. Established borders are the result of power decisions by the powerful. (Espín 2013: 22)

Since the creation of borders is a decision made by the "powerful," the immigration debate itself is deeply and widely political in nature. The creation of borders itself is clearly a political matter, one that reflects the control, harassment, and violations of a people. In the US, Latin@s have been the victims of imperial political power for centuries.

Azaransky has herself summarized the historical and political background of the creation of the US border. The southern border came about as a consequence of the Mexican–American War in 1846. What began as a dispute spiraled into “territorial conquest,” as Miguel De La Torre and others have noted (De La Torre 2009: 10). The US insisted that the dividing borderline was the Rio Grande, while the Mexicans declared that the border was further north by the Nueces River. This contest led to an outright war in which the US demanded and then conquered territory that would become the states of California, Texas, Nevada, Utah, and parts of Arizona, Wyoming, New Mexico, and Colorado. De La Torre, among others, has noted that the US ideologically and politically justified its heinous acts of terror through the concept of Manifest Destiny (Traverzo Galarza 1998). The US saw its role in territorial expansion as a divine commandment; it perceived itself as destined to be an instrument of divine purpose in the world. The conquest and annihilation of a people are a natural consequence of this divine will in much the same way as Israel’s conquest and holy war in early biblical times.

The initial effects of the conquest and the establishment of the border were not immediately felt. The policing and enforcement that are now customary did not take effect until the 1920s, as Azaransky has noted. By then, Presidents Taft and Wilson began the policing of these territories. This initiated the militarization of the border. Pancho Villa’s revolutionary acts during this same time period exacerbated this militarization. Under the presidency of Calvin Coolidge (1924), the Border Patrol was created. Prior to the initiation of the Border Patrol the US had enlisted “watchmen” to patrol the border towns and prevent “illegal” crossing into US territory. This initiative, not planned or executed systematically or given sufficient government funding, gave way to the eventual creation of the Border Patrol, which has since become one of the largest law enforcement agencies in the US.

Miguel De La Torre’s tome *Trails of Hope and Terror* (2009) is another important work to trace the political and religious underpinnings of immigration in the US. What is particularly significant about this work is that the author has included the words of the voiceless themselves, as the subtitle of the text (*Testimonies on Immigration*) suggests. De La Torre notes that in addition to territorial conquest, as a result of the US war against Mexico (a reality mired in political decision-making), the US pursued a very real and intentional “economic expansion” as well. He puts it this way: “By the start of the twentieth century the United States was less interested in acquiring territory than in controlling peripheral economies to obtain financial benefits” (De La Torre 2009: 12). De La Torre submits that US foreign policy (from Theodore Roosevelt to the present day) has fought to protect the interests of US corporations. This has fueled the interventions of the US in the direct affairs of our neighbors south of the Rio Grande. The dominance of this foreign policy – the protection of the interests of gargantuan US corporations – has resulted in the “globalization” of this political thought:¹ “Following the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989), the United States emerged as the world’s only superpower, and the system of capitalism (also called neoliberalism) became the undisputed economic model. Profits

of transnational corporations could now increase by pitting workers in one country against workers in another" (De La Torre 2009, 13).

This analysis serves to point to some of the historical underpinnings on the issue of immigration and how the matter is a consequence of "power decisions by the powerful," as Espín has noted. Because of immigration's political roots, a myriad of Latin@s advocate for the wellbeing of Latin@ families adversely affected by racist immigration policies. Gaston Espinosa (one of the few Latin@ religious scholars to engage in the academic discourse on religion and politics) has written on the work of various Latin@ religious figures and organizations, as well as other individuals sympathetic to the immigration cause. Such faith leaders have entered the political realm in a number of ways in an effort to shift the direction of unjust immigration policies. Advocacy for more humane and just policies, the building of cross-racial/cultural coalitions, and the mobilization involved in these efforts are examples of the political approach undertaken by many Latin@ faith leaders. Espinosa has captured some of this work in his writings. In one such work he reviews the work of Cardinal Roger Mahony, the former archbishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Los Angeles, and Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, who leads one of the larger Latino faith-based groups in the nation (Espinosa 2011). In response to HR 4437 in 2006, a House bill seeking to further criminalize the undocumented, Cardinal Mahony and Rodriguez initiated a vast advocacy campaign to deter the bill from becoming law. Espinosa notes that Cardinal Mahony and other Roman Catholic leaders created the Justice for Immigrants Campaign (JIC) as a way to influence political decision makers, and to mobilize other religious leaders and concerned citizens for the purpose of seeking justice for Latin@ families. The campaign launched by the cardinal was a very sophisticated and strategic public affairs operation. Espinosa notes that the campaign had four specific goals: (1) to re-shift the thought among Roman Catholics that immigration is a "social problem;" (2) to influence public opinion with the message of that first goal; (3) to advocate for more humane and just immigration laws, which would create paths for citizenship; and (4) to push Roman Catholic legal service providers to help the undocumented navigate and reap the positive effects of a better immigration law.

As part of their campaign to influence public opinion and policy makers, Cardinal Mahony penned an op-ed piece in *The New York Times* in order to make his claim that HR 4437 "violates a law with higher authority than Congress – the Law of God" (Espinosa 2011: 129.) The cardinal and others involved in the JIC coalition also implemented a letter campaign that reached President George W. Bush and other congressional leaders. The coalition initiated prayer and fasting vigils (a tactic employed by Cesar Chavez) and marches to advocate specific immigration reforms. The marches were deliberately multiracial and inter-religious as a global display of unity.

Another important figure that Espinosa notes in this discourse (though one not directly involved with the cardinal's efforts) is Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference (NHCLC). NHCLC has proposed to serve and empower Latin@s on issues directly affecting them. As Espinosa has noted, the organization was modeled on the African American Southern Christian Leadership

Conference, a group originally spearheaded by the Rev. Dr Martin Luther King, Jr. Describing the purposes of NHCLC, Espinosa has noted that they seek to “provide leadership” before legislators, economic, and faith leaders around the country; organize annual conferences for the purposes of “revival, renewal, and restoration”; create networking opportunities in order to build coalitions around social justice issues; and “engage in political and social advocacy” (Espinosa 2011: 132). With these goals, Rodriguez immersed himself in the 2006 immigration debate. Meetings with key congressional leaders were organized, letter campaigns were implemented, a campaign to “reframe” the meaning of illegal immigration took place, and partnerships with other Evangelical groups were started to persuade key figures who could influence the rejection of HR 4437. President Bush and other Republican leaders noticed Rodriguez’ efforts, and this led to networking with Republican Party circles. In 2012 Rodriguez was invited to lead a prayer at the Republican National Convention. Espinosa’s article points to the fact that Latin@ leaders have immersed themselves directly in the political process with the purpose of influencing public opinion and US powerbrokers.

It is important to note, however, that immigration is not exclusively a political matter. Immigration has deep religious and theological underpinnings too. Orlando Espín in particular has examined the theological implications of immigration. In his view, the reality of immigration points to a key Christian metaphor: the people of God as a “pilgrim people.” The image of a pilgrim people is, however, more than just a metaphor. It speaks directly to the *realidad* of a people that are “on the move.” The metaphor of the people of God as pilgrim cuts to the theological core of the Judeo-Christian biblical tradition. Espín captures the true meaning and consequence of the people of God as pilgrims and the inherent questions accompanying this doctrinal supposition, such as this:

Can we be on a “pilgrimage” without ever “moving”? Can a people “move” into the future without somehow becoming “immigrants” into that very future? Can we do theology or ministry without somehow reflecting on the meaning of “migrating” (even if only from the known to the unknown)? Can we be Christian without *ourselves* becoming “immigrants” into the promised future of humankind? Can we speak seriously and responsibly about the future fulfillment of the Reign of God without realizing that it requires *our* “migrating” into the future, and thus *our* becoming “immigrants” in and to the Reign? (Espín 2013: 21)

In a very real way, to be a Christian implies to be an immigrant. However, the doctrinal implications of immigration extend beyond this pilgrim image. Espín points out that the human being as image of God has and should have important implications for the way the powerful make decisions over the powerless. The opposite can also be said: power decisions made by the powerful that adversely affect the powerless suggest a bankrupt theological system which justifies the inhumane laws proposed, enacted, and enforced by the oppressors. Clearly, the theological *and* political implications of what Espín proposes are vast and profound, and should be examined carefully and fully by Latin@ religious scholars.

Electoral politics in Latin@ religion and politics

In addition to the immigration discourse found in Latin@ religion and politics, Latin@ religious scholars have delved into the significance of Latin@ voting participation in conjunction with religious affiliations. Again, one of the few to do so is Gaston Espinosa. Specifically, he has translated the significance of voting participation among Latin@s within presidential elections. Many Latin@s, he concludes, have always been engaged in the political electoral process. The significance and potential impact of Latin@ voting participation within the US electoral process are not new. Just like African Americans, many Latin@s in the early part of the twentieth century tended to support Republican causes and candidates. During the administration (or as a result of it) of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, however, Latin@s began to affiliate with the Democratic Party in larger numbers. Clearly, the social and economic programs initiated by the FDR presidency had a profound impact on much of the Latin@ community. With the increase in numbers of Latin@s in the US, especially after the 1940s and 1950s, Latin@s became a voting bloc of increasing importance. By the 1970s, Latin@s as voters came of age in many ways. This was especially evident around urban centers in the US, when the country saw an increase of Latin@ elected officials and a flood of immigration into the inner cities and even beyond.

The growth in numbers of Latin@s in the US and the rise of Latin@ political representation were especially evident in places such as New York City. The migration of Puerto Ricans to New York City, which actually began in the nineteenth century (1860s), continued in the early twentieth century, and reached its height in the 1940s through the 1960s (Traverzo Galarza 1989). As a result, Puerto Ricans (then the largest Latin@ group in New York) began to populate areas such as East Harlem (also known as *El Barrio*), Bushwick, Williamsburg, the South Bronx, and the Lower East Side. With the influence of Puerto Ricans in New York, Oscar Garcia Rivera became the first Puerto Rican elected official there in the late 1930s, and Tony Mendez became the first Latino (Puerto Rican) elected Democratic district leader in 1954. At that time this elected position was critical in the operations of the Party and the selection of judges. Mendez' daughter-in law, Olga Mendez, became the first Puerto Rican Latina female to be elected to a state legislature in the country in 1978.

But it was Herman Badillo, a Puerto Rican lawyer, who would win the hearts of Latin@s in New York and hold important positions in the city. Badillo became the first Puerto Rican Latino to be elected Bronx Borough president, and in 1970 he became the first Puerto Rican to be elected to the US House of Representatives. In 1977, he came close to being the first Puerto Rican Latino mayor in the City of New York. As we come full circle to 2014, Latin@s continue to hold sway in political circles in New York. In January 2014, the New York City Council selected Melissa Mark Viverito, a Puerto Rican Latina, as the speaker of that crucial legislative body. The fact that she has become the Latina with the most political influence in the City of New York is not without significance.²

Gaston Espinosa, in his edited project *Religion, Race, and the American Presidency*, has alluded to a similar influence within the wider US electorate, particularly Latin@ voting patterns in presidential elections from 1996 to the present. He notes that the Latin@ population has more than doubled since 1990. With this population increase in mind, Espinosa declares that no presidential candidate can be a legitimate contender without establishing relationships with the US Latin@ community. The outreach of major presidential candidates to Latin@ communities across the nation over the years has proven that Latin@s have become a key voting bloc in the country.

The George W. Bush campaign in 2000 was perhaps the most sophisticated and strategic in its outreach to Latin@s across the country. Interestingly, the Hispanic Churches in American Public Life (HCAPL) survey of 2000, which Espinosa helped coordinate, showed that 44 percent of “Latinos who planned to vote for Bush in 2000 had voted for Clinton in 1996” (Espinosa 2008: 256). Clearly, Al Gore, Bush’s opponent, lost key support among Latin@s and this was one of the key reasons Gore lost the election. Espinosa observes that Bush deliberately campaigned on issues that would resonate with Latin@s, particularly religious practitioners. Espinosa asserts, “Bush strategically picked winning issues among Latinos as they overwhelmingly supported prayer in school (74 percent), charitable choice (70 percent), and school vouchers (60 percent)” (Espinosa 2008: 256). As a result of the issues selected strategically by Bush strategists and the intentional outreach to Latin@ communities, Bush *doubled* the number of Latin@s that voted for a Republican from the previous presidential election in 1996. The HCAPL survey offers specific breakdowns among Latin@s along religious affiliation. For example, 33 percent of Roman Catholic Latin@s voted for Bush and 53 percent of “born-again” Protestant Latin@s did so as well. The survey showed that the Democrat’s level of support among all Latin@ Christians fell significantly between the 1996 and 2000 elections.

Espinosa comments that after Bush’s election, the Administration developed “the most successful long-term outreach campaigns to the Latino community” (Espinosa 2008: 261). He points to the overtures Bush made to Latino Roman Catholics, mainline, Evangelical, and Pentecostal faith leaders and groups. Bush promoted and supported the work of Latino FBOs and appointed Latin@ faith leaders to positions in his administration. At his 2004 re-election, the level of support from Latin@s was historic for a Republican presidential candidate. Espinosa cites national surveys that declared that Bush gained up to 40 percent of the Latin@ vote, an astronomical number for a national Republican candidate. This level of support is more staggering when we consider that *almost half* of all Latin@s identify themselves as Democrats. Various surveys indicated that Bush’s stances on “moral” issues were determining factors in Latin@ voting preference.

As the 2000 election demonstrated, in just four years significant shifts can occur within specific voting blocs. That is what transpired in the 2008 election of Barack Obama. Espinosa was a key interpreter of the voting patterns of Latin@ Christian voters (Roman Catholic and Protestant) within this historic election (Espinosa 2008, 2012). He noted that throughout the campaign Obama polled strongly among Latin@s more

generally and among Christian Latin@s specifically. The historic nature of Obama's candidacy coupled with his message of change resonated with Latin@s. Obama received 57 percent of the Latin@ Protestant vote. His share of Latin@ Roman Catholic votes was higher (69 percent).

Espinosa remarks that Obama's campaign was as strategic as was Bush's in reaching out to Latin@s. Since more liberal-minded Latin@s would resonate with Obama's more liberal positions, he strategically moved to the center on other critical matters to appeal to moderate and more conservative Latin@ Roman Catholic and Evangelical voters. For instance, he came out in support of "traditional" marriage and also promised to continue to support faith-based initiatives, a policy proposal initiated by George W. Bush. These efforts were enough to convince Latin@ Roman Catholics and Evangelicals that voting for Obama would not be detrimental to their conscience and nation. Mark Gray, in his chapter in *Blessing La Politica* (another important work on Latin@ religion and politics), has observed that if it were not for the widespread support Obama received among Latin@s, it would have been almost impossible for him to win the critical states of Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Florida (Gray 2012: 157).

When it comes to the impact of Latin@ religious voters in the 2012 election, little academic reflection has yet taken place. Several exit polling data, however, and the work done by Latino Decisions, a Latino-based public opinion research firm, have uncovered a slightly different outcome in voting preference. The study has shown that while Obama obtained 81 percent of the Latin@ Roman Catholic vote, his share among those labeling themselves "born-again" was 54 percent (Latino Decisions 2012). According to data studies by Mark Gray, in 2008 Obama received support from 61 percent of those in that category, which points to a seven-point drop in the 2012 election (Gray 2012: 157). The decrease in support from "born-again" Latin@s, who tend to be more conservative than other Latin@s, can in part be attributed to Obama declaring his support for same-sex marriage, gays in the military, and abortion. Some prominent Latin@ faith leaders, such as Rev. Wilfredo De Jesus from Chicago, actually abandoned their support for Obama because of his inaction on immigration reform. The loss of support from someone like De Jesus was significant since he was an important surrogate for Obama among Latin@ Evangelicals. It will be interesting to see how Latin@ scholars will assess the impact of Latin@ religious participation in years to come, but the likes of Espinosa, the work of Latino Decisions, and Carlos Vargas-Ramos and Anthony Stevens-Arroyo's *Blessing La Politica* (2012) have been instrumental in understanding the significance and historical patterns of the Latin@ religious vote.

Latin@ faith-based organizations

One of the more significant recent contributions to Latin@ religion and politics has been Catherine Wilson's *The Politics of Latino Faith*. The distinctiveness of this project, as Wilson herself notes, is that the book is "the first systematic treatment of Latino FBOs in the United States" (Wilson 2008: 3). One of the reasons Wilson has undertaken this

project is that for several decades Latin@ FBOs have been instrumental agents in the reconstruction of national urban centers. In many ways, these organizations have been at the forefront of the battle to confront the myriad ills that have plagued US cities. What makes FBOs distinctive, when compared to community-based organizations (CBOs), is that the former operate with an intentional theological language and mission. FBOs are thus moved to action based on their distinctive theological underpinnings. Wilson has realized that religious views directly influence the nature, scope, purpose, and impact of the community work of Latino FBOs. This theological framework has led Wilson to introduce the concept of *religious identity politics* as a key category in understanding the work of these Latin@ organizations.

Wilson observes that the concept of religious identity politics is a novelty in the field of political science. Whereas political scientists (and one can include other social scientists) have traditionally viewed political participation and mobilization from a purely quantifiable perspective, this new approach examines the qualitative foundations of political thought and practice. Wilson bases her text on this methodological framework. My contention is that the category of *religious identity politics* (as proposed by Wilson) is required to understand the role that theological and religious beliefs play in the shaping and participation of Latin@s in the political realm.

Wilson describes religious identity politics as “the content and context of religious values, beliefs, and culture that drive social and political action in community life” (Wilson 2008: 14). Several implications are tied to this methodology. First, religious identity politics begins with the individual believer who views a personal engagement with the elements of their faith as foundational for their individual and communal life. Second, this individual believer does not remain an island unto himself or herself but is immersed in a house of worship where their faith is fortified and affirmed. Lastly, the elements of their faith – both personal and communal – drive their social and political outlook and participation. This three-pronged approach aims to take seriously the religious experiences of a community of people while acknowledging that these experiences have tremendous and lasting political implications.

As Wilson examined the work of the Latino FBOs, she realized that these organizations “help the Latino community to mediate its religious sensibilities and, in so doing, prepare this community for social and political involvement in the urban context” (Wilson 2008: 5). Hence, these groups display and confirm the need for religious identity politics as a crucial methodology for the study of “politics,” since it is the theological and religious that have been a motivational and foundational factor in the groups’ respective social and political undertakings.

Wilson begins her study of FBOs with the Latino Pastoral Action Center (LPAC), which housed multiple social programs and a charter school in the Bronx, New York. LPAC has defined itself as a “para-church” organization that is interdenominational in perspective. They have provided programs aimed for at-risk youth, family counseling services, after-school programs for kids, and the establishment of a local church to serve the community. The ultimate goal of this work, Wilson observes, is the attainment of *personal* liberation or transformation. Rev. Raymond Rivera, the

founder of LPAC (its first CEO, now retired), has stated that social and political transformation cannot be attained if the *individual* is not liberated. What underlies LPAC's activities is a "theology of captivity." Such a theology declares that the poor and oppressed are continuously in conditions of bondage. At the same time, Rivera believes, God has a plan for liberation, which must be implemented by God's people, whether through a church, a para-church organization, an FBO, or even a governmental agency.³ What underlies this vast work in social service, Wilson continues, is a theology that drives the agenda of an entire organization and leads people to political action.

The second FBO that Wilson examines is Nueva Esperanza in the city of Philadelphia. Esperanza is the community development arm of Hispanic Clergy of Philadelphia, an interdenominational operation founded by Rev. Luis Cortés. Cortés and his brother Danny are the engines behind this now national organization, which began as a local enterprise. Esperanza's influence has become national news with its annual National Prayer Breakfast, which attracts significant national political and religious leaders. Wilson observes that the work of Nueva Esperanza differs operationally from LPAC in that Cortés has sought *institutional* rather than personal development. Hence, "Nueva's macro-level approach to ministry emphasizes the important role of building structures in the inner city ... and lies at the opposite end of LPAC's personal, or micro-level, approach, to ministry" (Wilson 2008: 34).

Cortés has set out to empower Latin@s and other national minority groups through the development of housing, employment opportunities, and educational initiatives. He has founded a local college affiliated to Eastern University (an American Baptist college) to serve inner-city residents. At the core of Esperanza's work is a theology that undergirds its philosophy and operation. As a disciple of the late Orlando E. Costas, Cortés affirms the transformative impact of the gospel in its totality: personal, community, national, and global. Underlying such a theology is recognition of the "political significance of all theological work" (Wilson 2008: 141). It is important to note here that both Rev. Rivera and Rev. Cortés were strongly marked by the life and work of Costas, a Latino evangelical liberation theologian who was foundational in developing US Latin@ theology.⁴

One of the key theological constructs of Costas was a liberative holistic theology and mission with prophetic and global implications. Grounded in the very mission of Christ to liberate the poor and oppressed, this theological system engages the social, political, cultural, and economic institutions and systems of the world. The ministerial methods and theological understandings of Rivera and Cortés may differ but their theological foundations stem from these holistic and liberationist roots.

The last FBO, the Resurrection Project (TRP), also takes its cue from liberation theological thought. Founded by Father Charles Dahm, OP, it continued through the leadership of Raul Raymundo. The goal was to achieve "community empowerment" on behalf of the Mexican American and new-arriving Mexican immigrants in Chicago. In many ways, particularly theologically and ministerially, TRP incorporates the belief and actions behind the work of LPAC and Esperanza. TRP strives to achieve personal *and*

institutional empowerment and liberation. In terms of the social and political work that stems from TRP, Wilson has made special reference to their work in community organizing. This includes a myriad of issues that affect Latin@s in Chicago, and the building of coalitions with African American development corporations to advance the goals of wider community empowerment. In addition to political and social work, TRP advances its goals and work through “spiritual empowerment.” TRP holds and observes religious festivities, such as the veneration of la Virgen of Guadalupe, the celebration of novenas, and the re-enactments of the *Via Crucis*. In this way, TRP advances holistic ministry in which the varying needs of Latin@s are met through social, political, and religious work.

Wilson has correctly noted, therefore, that indeed *religious identity politics* has undergirded the work of TRP, Nueva Esperanza, and the LPAC. In the following section, I will return to the category of religious identity politics as a way to explore and examine the effects of religiosity and theological suppositions on Latin@ voting participation and mobilization.

Latin@ Religion and Politics: Some Methodological Considerations

One of the deficiencies in the academic study of Latin@ religion and politics is the absence of any clear and sustained explication of the terms “religion” and “politics.” It is almost assumed that readers understand what is meant by Latin@ religiosity and how Latin@s understand and participate in the political process. In *Latino Religions and Civic Activism in the United States* (Espinoza, Elizondo, and Miranda 2005), we can note the use of the plural term “religions.” While this plural use describes the multifarious religious traditions inherent among Latin@s, nowhere in this text do we find any serious or intentional reflection on the shape and form of Latin@ religious practices. Nor do we find any sustained reflection on the shape of political thought and action. This vacuum is not just in this aforementioned text; other works in the field (including the ones mentioned in the preceding section) also do not elaborate on these crucial terms.

My intent here is not merely to describe *how* the religious practices of Latin@s become manifested but rather to explore criteria at the very root of what we mean by “religion.” Religion in the Latin@ community is clearly not a homogeneous reality. There have been a myriad of religious traditions followed and practiced by Latin@s in the United States and abroad. My task here is to define Latin@ religion more broadly in a way that could speak to many traditions. I find useful the understanding of religion espoused by Anthony Pinn, a prominent African American religious scholar. Pinn describes religion thus:

religion is that which provides orientation or direction for human life, ‘for life in the world, together with motivation for living and acting in accordance with this orientation – that is, would gain, and gradually formulate, a sense of the *meaning* of human existence ...’

[(Kaufman 1993: 225)] In terms of praxis or movement through the maze of life (e.g., the problem of evil), religion helps individuals and groups live in beneficial ways, in light of life-altering (hence theological) questions that are not easily addressed through skills and resources associated with the patterns of actions learned and acted out from infancy through adulthood. Therefore, religion at its core is a process of meaning-making. (Pinn 1998: 3)

This process of “meaning-making” has further implications for historically oppressed communities, such as Latin@s and African Americans. In *Terror and Triumph*, Pinn explains that the religious experiences of oppressed groups (in his case African Americans) “involve a new life meaning that encourages continued struggle for a more liberated existence” (Pinn 2003: 175). Therefore we can say, as Pinn has posited, that religion is the process by which humans seek and achieve meaning. Oppressed people, as in the case of Latin@s, achieve meaning through their religious practices while they struggle for liberation. For instance, Orlando Espín has noted that Latin@ popular religiosity has contributed to self-affirmation and group affirmation among Latin@s even as they struggle against injustices that inhibit their potential to complete their liberation. Hence, Latin@ popular Roman Catholicism is a religion “of the vanquished.” Espín puts it this way: “Popular Catholicism is the ‘shape’ that Latino Christianity, doubly vanquished in history, found most meaningful for the affirmation and survival of its cultural identity and of its faith heritage and life” (Espín 1997: 58). Other Latin@ theologians have explored the positive effects of popular religiosity on their respective Christian traditions (e.g., Rodriguez 2004; Aponte 1995; Pedraja 1999). Religion, more broadly, is a meaning-making process that allows individuals and groups to claim ultimacy through their respective symbols, rituals, and overall theological positions. For Latin@s, as we have noted, their existential reality as a “vanquished group” results in a “new life meaning,” since within and through their religiosity a struggle for liberation and affirmation takes place.

“Politics” is a term that can mean anything and everything. Some people have understood politics merely as the process and function of government and the effects of governing on a community of people. For instance, political theologian William Cavanaugh has defined politics (or the political) as “the use of structural power to organize a society or community of people” (quoted in Phillips 2012: 3). This view restricts the political exclusively to the structural. To be sure, politics can, and indeed must, reflect on the effects of the structural (and by structural I would assume Cavanaugh means the existence of a “permanent government” as well as economic systems established by such a government). But politics is and must be more than this. More broadly, politics involves the structural (governmental and otherwise), the *responses* to the structural by the greater public (by means of voting participation and mobilization, advocacy work, and so forth), and the *inherent relationships* between all in the public sphere. Contrary to Cavanaugh, I suggest that the responses to the structural power are as much political as the structural itself. Structural power serves not only as an organizing principle but, as can be seen from the creation of borderlands, tends to disorganize communities of

people. In a sense, politics entails a constant conversation and response between permanent government (as a reality of structural power) and the community of people that it represents and serves. With this in mind, the work done by FBOs is political, as are the responses of and reflections by communities on the matter of immigration. Reflections on issues and the resulting participation in matters pertaining to such issues must be deemed *political* responses and proposals that contribute to the greater public sphere.

"Politics" is therefore not just a process established or imposed by structural powers. The political strives toward something greater – providing individuals and groups the ability to thrive in a meaningful and just way. This view is close to Aristotle's own understanding of politics as the vehicle that assists people in achieving a "good life." Reinhold Niebuhr, a great political theologian of the twentieth century, also characterized politics as the process by which justice could be attained within the *polis*, or the public sphere.

This understanding of politics would have, I believe, great implications for Latin@s as a "vanquished" people. Those who serve and work in Latin@ politics must bear in mind the existential plight that Latin@s face as a people in the United States. The political process for Latin@s should not exclusively result in the attainment of power for the sake of power and privilege, but must serve this greater good – to correct the ills that historically have plagued and made victims of Latin@s. Latin@ politics should and must be the vehicle that can lead to a greater valuation of our culture, serve to eliminate overt ethnic and racial bigotry, and speak to and against the despicable economic exploitation and disparity inherent in our society. What I believe should undergird the work and thought in Latin@ politics is an *emancipatory political project* as advocated by Benjamin Valentin and Mark Lewis Taylor. Valentin in, *Mapping Public Theology*, notes:

I grant that any comprehensive political project that is genuinely concerned with the remedy of injustice must make room in its agenda for the consideration of issues related to the defense of group identity, the end of cultural domination, and the requirements of recognition. These concerns and struggles have everything to do with justice and must continue to be part of any emancipatory project. (Valentin 2002: xiii)

Valentin insists that an emancipatory politics is "attentive to the demands for recognition and redistribution in society" (2002: 106). More recently, Mark Lewis Taylor has also called for an emancipatory politics in the US. For Taylor, emancipatory politics is:

the dreaming and sentiment, the practice and thinking, which extends egalitarian principles of opportunity and empowerment to those who bear imposed social suffering. It seeks to acknowledge the creativity, resilience and power of those whom Jacques Rancière discusses as "the part that has no part" in social and political systems, those who know an "inclusion" in systems of unequal power, but whose exploitation there is also an "exclusion" from life-giving empowerment.⁵

It is precisely because of conditions of despair and dejection that Latin@ politics must point to ways that empower the greater community to bring about justice, liberation, and “egalitarian principles of opportunity” to those who need it most.

In some ways, the work of the Latino FBOs mentioned earlier has sought to espouse emancipatory politics. Catherine Wilson has made clear the intent and work of their respective groups: these FBOs strive to bring about personal and communal empowerment through religious and political means. These FBOs have developed *political* responses to the social injustice that has plagued their respective constituencies. Some may not see their work as political but, as I have defined “political,” the work of Cortés, Rivera, and the TRP is fundamentally political in nature, since there is a clear response to political systems developed as structural powers.

In my view, however, the work of these particular FBOs has espoused a truncated understanding of “emancipatory politics,” since they have focused their work on supplying social services, as opposed to the fundamental transformation of the political system itself. In the case of Rivera and Cortés, these FBOs have sought to fill a vacuum that churches historically had not occupied. On account of a non-holistic theological inheritance, many Latin@ churches have neglected the overt and prophetic social work needed to minister holistically in a “captive” world. While social services is a crucial task in Latin@ urban centers, “social work” should not be the exclusive function of Latin@ FBOs. To embody the holistic liberative theology and mission advocated by Orlando Costas, these FBOs must move beyond the reformist task to access and allocate social services, and to negotiate with political power. An emancipatory political project is all-embracing and truly holistic when the goal is to strive for systemic justice. The kind of emancipatory political project for Latino FBOs that might move to this next level is perhaps what Rev. Gabriel Salguero has attempted with the 2010 founding of the National Latino Evangelical Coalition (NaLEC). This group has intended to broaden the Latin@ Evangelical agenda by building coalitions with Bread for the World (a Christian group that seeks to end hunger in the US and the world), the National Association of Evangelicals (an Evangelical advocacy group representing millions of Evangelicals), and the Evangelical Environmental Network (a group advocating for the protection of the environment). Salguero has sought to engage in sustained policy analysis, developing policy papers for the wider public and policy makers from what he considers a Latin@ Evangelical perspective. NaLEC’s work has received the attention of the White House, of elected officials from both parties, and of Congress. What NaLEC offers is a holistic political model not just for providing essential social services but for engaging in sustained political advocacy with a prophetic edge on behalf of Latin@s in society.

I submit that an emancipatory political project that encapsulates a holistic and transformational praxis should extend to the “issues” and key questions that Latin@ scholars and social practitioners identify in the public sphere. It seems as if the matter of “immigration” has been the exclusive or preferred issue of choice in our scholarly and political ruminations. Public polls, however, have indicated that immigration is not the only matter on the table for Latin@s in the US. A Gallup poll fielded during the last

presidential election noted that proper and adequate *health care, unemployment, and economic growth* are matters as important as immigration to Latin@s (Gallup 2012). If Latin@ religion and politics (as an academic discourse) are to be more comprehensive and efficacious, and intend to address frontally the dismal plight of many US Latin@s, these aforementioned critical matters must be a central topic of conversation. If Latin@ religion and politics seek to be an emancipatory political project, they must speak to issues of political economy and other systemic matters that directly impact the Latin@ community.

I submit that the matter of an efficacious impetus with a holistic framework is crucial for a true emancipatory political project. The lived temptation, however, is to benefit from and capitulate to reformist and self-serving agendas that produce superficial and temporary relief from real poverty, pervasive oppression, and ultimate powerlessness. As David Traverzo Galarza has stated in his concluding chapter in *Christianity and Culture in the City* (Cruz 2013), there is a real history among the oppressed (yet rising) academic elite of accommodating to the rewards and enticing intellectual capital of the status quo. In this vein, Traverzo Galarza identifies Elonda Clay, who calls for “urgency and outrage over the conditions of poverty and economic exploitation” (Cruz 2013: 157).

I assert that an emancipatory project that breaks with an accommodationist option throws in its lot *not* with the rising intellectual elite (of the oppressed), but with “the poor, powerless, and oppressed” (Costas 1982: 13). This emancipatory alternative seeks to be autonomous, anti-imperialist, and anti-colonial. It fights explicitly and relentlessly against coloniality and its overt and covert manifestations among US Latin@ life, the Hispanic faith community, and “the underside of history” (Traverzo Galarza 1992). As opposed to an intellectual vision and academic articulation that projects a colonized mentality, this emancipatory vision offers “an alternative imaginary” (Cruz 2013: 162).

An emancipatory project that is more comprehensive and anti-colonial will lift up and focus upon the concrete and immediate transformation of both personal and systemic spheres as integral factors and not as polar opposites or competing agendas. It was the late Orlando E. Costas who represented in life and articulated consummately this kind of holistic and transformatory project. This is an emancipatory project that unites what some have atomized or placed in irredeemable tension. Too often, academic elites (this includes those doing religion and politics) surrender to “theological precision and missiological awareness,” or quantitative or ethnographic sophistication, to the detriment of our concrete and manifest solidarity with those “from below,” namely US Latin@s. Costas summarized this matter in the following way:

The real issue is whether or not we as Christians are willing to be immersed in the concrete situations of the disfranchised of our societies and witness to the lordship and saviorhood of Christ from within, a commitment that will have to be verified in our participation in the concrete transformation of these situations. Anything else is pure talk, and the kingdom of God “does not consist in talk but in power” (2 Cor. 4:20). (Costas 1982: 12)

One point at which such an emancipatory project breaks into the life and analysis of religion and politics, and represents concrete change, is when it does not shy away from a true "liberating project of Jesus Christ" (Costas 1982: 68).⁶ As Costas suggested, this kind of liberating project requires verification in the concrete transformations of those systems, structures, institutions, and agencies that perpetuate death, despair, and destruction as opposed to the affirmation of life and the denunciation of all that oppresses and deceives us around and inside us (Costas 1982: 94-5). This means that for us as scholars, pastors, community activists, and political consultants and activists, it is not sufficient to offer helpful and necessary analyses of what is wrong with the system, its latent or manifest death blows and repression.

Costas advocated that we transform ourselves into "prophetic minorities" and engage in "prophetic mobilization" that takes on the "mechanisms created by order to preserve the economic advantages that go along with the domination of the weak by the strong" (Costas 1982: 87). I contend that when we move beyond the reformist and selfish agendas so prevalent among religious and political work today, we will begin to deal with what Costas referred to as "the most obvious," as well as the less popular: "cheap labor, the expropriation of property without fair compensation, menial jobs in sub-human working conditions, the submission of women to men in all spheres of human production, and the lack of adequate care for the plight of the handicapped" (Costas 1982: 87).

We might add to this working agenda the military industrial complex, "the intelligence community" (CIA, NSA, FBI, Verizon), the "National Security" State, the "Patriot Act," "environmental pollution, the constant threat of war, racism, exploitation (economic, social, and sexual), political imperialism, and hegemonism that besiege our planet" (Costas 1982: 94). What is notoriously absent from the aforementioned reformist and capitulating approaches is an unapologetic and uncompromising ethic of comprehensive and risk-taking change. It seems as if the conventional and sterile approach of the academic status quo and even Latin@ FBOs has served to perpetuate the overall dismal conditions and depressed plight of most US Latin@s today. Unless the cosmic dimensions of oppression are also confronted and changed, we may expect more of the same for years to come.

It seems to me that an emancipatory project that is truly efficacious will stem from the grassroots majority itself rather than from the intellectual or even FBO community elite of our time. Writing grant proposals, taking pictures, praying, eating with the president of the United States, and having coffee with politicians will not produce the gargantuan and revolutionary change that is required today. It appears the dynamic and earth-shaking engagement of the gospel of Jesus Christ has ceded to political porridge and academic sterility. In order for an emancipatory project to turn the tables of poverty, oppression, and disempowerment, the liberating project of Jesus Christ is absolutely necessary, along with prophetic agents that stand and point to the empire and its cohorts and declare with no fear or hesitation: "you are the man (or woman)!"

There has been a betrayal and truncation of the emancipatory project that I submit is absolutely vital to include within this conversation and study of religion and politics.

Without such a project, I fear the “issues” and key questions posed will produce more impoverishment and alienation for the vast majority. The neglect of an emancipatory project will unfortunately produce more political benefits and status rewards for the academic and religious elite among us.

In a sense, this proposal may also be applied to the work done in electoral politics within the Latin@ religion and politics discourse. Scholars who have attempted to describe Latin@ voting patterns and aspects of mobilization have tended to reduce this study to numbers. They have developed a truncated method of looking into electoral politics. While it is important to quantify the historical and current voting tendencies and matters that lead to increased mobilization among Latin@s, ironically, quantitative analysis does not solely measure the motivations and actions of a group of people. What would electoral analysis look like if social scientists and other scholars considered these notations by Roberto Goizueta?

Human experience is not as neat as the well-defined universal concept or the logically devised mathematical formula. Ambiguity, variety, diversity, and particularity are absent from the world of universal concepts and abstract numbers . . . our lived experience is not so neat and unambiguous. For instance, we often experience “mixed” feelings of both joy and sadness, or both love and hate, or both fascination and fear. (Goizueta 1995: 134)

There are certain elements that may lie within electoral participation among Latin@s that either go undetected or cannot be so easily quantifiable. I believe that Catherine Wilson’s category of *religious identity politics* can be a useful methodological resource in the understanding of Latin@ voting participation and patterns, as well the motivations that drive mobilization on a myriad of issues. Since Latin@s are at heart a religious people (at least the first-generation experience is clear), then religious sensibilities play a critical role in how Latin@s vote and for whom they vote. Just as Latino FBOs’ work has been driven by their respective religious and theological suppositions, individual Latin@ voters are influenced by the content and context of their respective faith traditions. To know *how many* Latin@ religious voters voted does not capture the full picture. The ability to decipher how the Latin@ religious community voted in a given election and their choice of candidates is not an adequate method of understanding the root influences behind Latin@ voting patterns.

Religious identity politics, however, requires that one’s theology be taken seriously, and be seen as something that shapes and drives political practices and patterns. I have indicated that in his re-election effort, President Obama lost support among Latin@ Protestant Evangelical voters. There are perhaps real and crucial reasons why this occurred: we might consider, for example, Obama’s support for same-sex marriages or his refusal to curb abortion. Could this have contributed to the decline in his support by the aforementioned voters? In order to better understand and capture what transpired, we might decipher what were the theological underpinnings which led to this change of heart and voting. Using religious identity politics as a method for understanding Latin@ electoral choices could be a vital tool in this emerging academic discourse.

Conclusion

In this chapter I provided a basic overview of the intersection of Latin@ religion and politics. Three paradigmatic shifts can be noted from this particular discourse: reflections on “issues” directly affecting Latin@ communities; a look into the dynamics at play when it comes to the electoral participation of Latin@s within the United States; and lastly, an examination of the emergence of Latino FBOs. I offered several proposals in light of these paradigms in the academic study of Latin@ religion and politics. Underlying these proposals was a call to heed the challenge of an emancipatory political project. Emancipatory politics seeks to better human life by providing individuals and groups the ability to thrive in meaningful ways. The catalyst and result of this political project is a transformative and holistic praxis which helps empower groups, particularly historically oppressed groups, to bring about justice and liberation for those who need it most at a systemic level.

Lastly, I have observed that in many ways the political is tied to the theological. As a result, I have proposed an expanded use of religious identity politics as a means to understand more fully the political practices of Latin@s. Mere statistical study does not capture the complete picture behind the voting and mobilization patterns of Latin@s. But as Catherine Wilson notes, what lies underneath this praxis are religious and theological underpinnings which drive the political agendas of individuals and organizations. I believe that when the proposals and resources denoted in this chapter are addressed and actualized, our ultimate goal of total emancipation and divine humanization will come to pass.

As both a pastor and a political activist, let me close with a “pastoral challenge” that can be easily translated into a religious and political directive, religion and politics at its best. Costas called for such a dynamic and tense integration in light of a liberating agenda for the least of these, the poor of the earth. The religious vision and political mandate at stake is a more just and humane social order. Hence:

we ought to defend the rights of the poor to enjoy the basic amenities of life by championing more communal structures of social organization, such as an economy that offers genuine possibilities of socialized production and consumption, and a political structure that allows greater participation and guarantees personal rights and public safety. (Costas 1982: 95)

Notes

- 1 For a thorough explication of the meaning, effects, and political ramifications of globalization, see Espín (2014:, 47–54, 158 n. 29).
- 2 Some of the historical context of NYC Latino politics was shared with me by Mike Nieves, my mentor in political consulting. Nieves is a widely recognized Democratic consultant in New York. I am grateful for his keen analysis and historical knowledge of Latino politics in New York.

- 3 Ray Rivera expands on his understanding of captivity, and suggests how Christians can participate in God's plan for liberation, in *Liberty to the Captives: Our Call to Minister in a Captive World* (Rivera 2013).
- 4 For a rather comprehensive and critical review of Costas' life and work that reveals an interdisciplinary look at this theologian's vocation, see Traverzo Galarza (1992).
- 5 This quotation is taken from an interview with Taylor and his publisher, Fortress Press. The interview can be found at <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/TaylorInterview.pdf>. For an expansion of Taylor's emancipatory political project, see his *The Theological and Political: On the Weight of the World* (2011).
- 6 While I am attempting to contribute more broadly to the discourse of Latin@ religion and politics, I write from a particular theological and ecclesial context and tradition – that is, the indigenous Protestant *Evangelico* expression.

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Further Reading

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CHAPTER 26

Inter-Religious Dialogue

Why Should It Matter to Our Academic and Grassroots Communities?

Carlos F. Cardoza-Orlandi

There are three basic premises of this chapter. The first premise has to do with content. Inter-religious dialogue is an endeavor of mutual communication and engagement guided by a variety of purposes between or among two or more people who belong to different religions. Consequently, inter-religious dialogue is not dialogue between Christian confessions and/or traditions. Inter-religious dialogue is not dialogue between Catholics and Orthodox, Catholics and Evangelicals, Evangelicals and Orthodox, Evangelicals and Pentecostals, Catholics and Pentecostals, or Pentecostals and Orthodox. Dialogue among Christian confessions or traditions is what we call ecumenical dialogue. I want to emphasize that inter-religious dialogue is an endeavor of mutual communication and engagement guided by a variety of purposes between or among two or more people who belong to different religions. Inter-religious dialogue is, for example, an effort of mutual communication and engagement guided by the search for peace between an Evangelical community and a Muslim community; the effort of mutual communication and engagement guided by the search for faith-nourishing devotional practices between a Catholic community and a Buddhist community; the effort of mutual communication and engagement guided by the search for a deep understanding of the spiritual world between Pentecostals and followers of indigenous religions; and so on.

The second premise has to do with methodology and is rooted in questions of vocation. Theoretical and theological reflection is dynamic only to the extent to which it is a part of public discourse in language that is accessible, understandable, and educational in character. All theoretical and theological discourse should contribute to creating conditions and processes that will lead to the wellbeing of human beings and all of

Creation. Theory as well as theology should integrate the life of all Creation – including human experience – with observation and critical analysis, carving paths and creating conditions for peace and justice. African American theorist bell hooks (1994: 61) expresses it this way:

When our lived experience of theorizing is fundamentally linked to processes of self-discovery, of collective liberation, no gap exists between theory and practice. Indeed, what such experiences make more evident is the bond between the two – that ultimately reciprocal process wherein one enables the other. . . . Any theory that cannot be shared in everyday conversation cannot be used to educate the public.

The third premise is theological in character and has two aspects. The premise: all theology is contextual; for this reason, there is no such thing as a universal theology. All theology is a compilation of assertions and experiences that stem from questions in particular contexts. Consequently, if a faith community raises questions that are particular to its context, why is it assumed, in the first place, that its answers are universal, or, in the second place, that theological conclusions from other contexts can answer particular questions from that faith community's context? (See Walls 1996: 146.)

The fact that all theology is contextual does not eliminate the importance of dialogue between communities of faith in order to deepen and expand a theology in a particular context. For example, theologies from indigenous African churches have come to be an important resource for theological reflection in Christian communities in Cuba, especially on matters relating to the world of the spirits, spiritual mediations, and sacrifices. The theologies of indigenous African churches should not be the theology of Cuban churches. However, given the religious and cultural similarities between both churches, dialogue – in this case ecumenical – can inspire theological reflection in both.

This third premise – that theology is contextual – has two aspects in relation to inter-religious dialogue. In order to discuss the first aspect, it is necessary to provide some demographic and historical details.

Demographic details: Christianity's vitality is in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Pacific region, and among many immigrant communities in the United States and Canada. The old centers of Christian vitality – Europe, the United States, and Canada – are regions where Christianity's vitality has stagnated or is waning, except among some immigrant groups.¹

Historical details: There are two important terms to define this aspect, and I'd like to use Lamin Sanneh's (2003: 22) terminology to describe them.² The first term is *Global Christianity*. Sanneh uses this to refer to the Christian communities that have historical roots in European, Anglo American, or Anglo Canadian expressions, and to Euro American Christianities, excluding immigrant groups. Another way to define Global Christianity is by the term used at the beginning of the twentieth

century: “sending churches,” referring to those churches sending missionaries. The term *World Christianity* refers to Christianity located in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Pacific region – including its immigrants to the global North – that is not rooted in the ecclesial bureaucratic structures of Euro American Christianities. The term used at the beginning of the twentieth century was “receiving churches,” referring to churches which received Euro American missionaries. For the purpose of this chapter, I want to emphasize that I include immigrant groups from World Christianity regions living in Global Christianity regions as also constituting World Christianity.

The first aspect of this premise is the option of doing theology around inter-religious dialogue starting from the perspectives of World Christianity. Our theological legacy in Latin America and the Caribbean, and among some immigrant Christian groups, including Latinas/os, is principally characterized by the theological heritage of Global Christianity. The theologies of inter-religious dialogue in Global Christianity are intellectually informed by an idea of “religious otherness.”³ Almost all theologies of inter-religious dialogue in Global Christianity assume the absence of other religions in their contexts as normative. For this reason, any religious alternative to Christianity is observed as “other,” and is recorded in theological reflection in an extensive list of theological categories ranging from demonologization, to naïve appropriation of “religious otherness,” to more sophisticated theological constructs, including some proposals for theologies of religion. Most theological reflection in Global Christianity did not see itself as being under the obligation of creating other theological categories in relation to other religious alternatives – thus the Western Christendoms. Moreover, the little theology that did interact with other religious alternatives is usually omitted or ignored in the canon of theologies in Global Christianity used in curricula for theological and ministerial training. In the best possible cases, courses in theology of religions might be offered as electives. Nevertheless, courses in inter-religious dialogue are extremely rare.

Regardless of the breadth of this theological record in Global Christianity, the consequences are quite disappointing for our Latin American, Caribbean, and Latina/o inter-religious contexts. (1) The legacy of early modernity means a reluctance to seriously consider lived experience and religious alternatives; (2) the legacy of the Enlightenment has inspired an aversion to reclaiming religious identities as central to the life of communities; and (3) Christian alternatives to inter-religiosity have been limited to a polarizing among religions, or to the critical study of religions void of any religious conviction for fear of tarnishing supposedly pure academic or professional efforts.⁴ This theological legacy cannot contribute to inter-religious dialogues and theologies that are rooted in our Latin American, Caribbean, and Latina/o contexts.

The option of doing theology around inter-religious dialogue starting from the perspectives of World Christianity offers categories that open up the imaginary and expand our theological language for the work we do in our Latina/o, Latin American, and Caribbean contexts. (1) The overwhelming majority of theologies in World

Christianity exist in contexts with multiple religious alternatives – Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, indigenous religions, Afro Latina/o religions, *espiritismo* (Spiritism), and traditional religions. “Religious otherness” does not exist because these multiple religious alternatives are constituent of our daily life. (2) Christian identity is fluid in these contexts of multiple religious options. There does not exist a *single* Christian identity but rather multiple Christian identities rooted in their fluid religious contexts. (3) Christian identity is neither limited by a polarizing attitude nor exclusively determined by language and behavior that are hostile to other religions. (4) Christian identity is not lost among other religious options. To the contrary, as it is neither restricted by a polarizing attitude nor determined by hostile language and behavior, it can reclaim a legitimate position among the variety of religions and religious alternatives in its context. Lastly, (5) Christian identity can offer a context-based religious alternative, in terms of and different from other religious alternatives. These categories in World Christianity should guide our Latin American, Caribbean, and Latina/o theologies of inter-religious dialogue; without a doubt they guide my theologies and this chapter.

The second aspect of this premise is personal and inspired by the theology of Brazilian Rubem Alves. For Alves, theology and biography are intertwined (Alves 1986).⁵ For me, this theology of inter-religious dialogue is shaped and informed by an unfinished pilgrimage of faith that is interpersonal, academic, and spiritual in character, and that has led me to continually discover the meaning of God’s words to Moses in front of the burning bush, “take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground” (Exodus 3:5).

Christian experience and theology are in a constant process of becoming new. The Christian religion is an eschatological religion; the Christian community lives in between what is familiar and what is new. Nevertheless, the time *cronos* does not exist in the Christian religion. Christian communities live in the time of *kairos*, in the special time of God. In this state of time, the time of *kairos*, memory – that which is old – and experience – that which is immediate – fuse together to create new possibilities – that which is new. My interactions with my own Christian tradition and my encounters, interactions, and dialogue with people, symbols, and rituals of different religions produce a new perspective, a new Christian imaginary – at times vague and at times very clear – but with a certain continuity with that which is familiar. The words of Thomas Merton illustrate my theology and biography in relation to my encounter, interactions, and dialogue with other religions. He says, “Living is the constant adjustment of thought to life and life to thought in such a way that we are always growing, always experiencing new things in the old and old things in the new. Thus life is always new” (Merton 1958: 17).

In summary, the third premise – that all theology is contextual – has two aspects: choosing to create theologies of inter-religious dialogue using perspectives from World Christianity, I incorporate my unfinished pilgrimage of encounter and relationships with people of other religions with a theology and experience of faith that seek justice and peace for our communities and the Creation that surrounds us.

Why Should Inter-Religious Dialogue Matter to Our Academic and Grassroots Christian Communities?

This is the fundamental question. And there are fundamental general answers. In an informal poll of my students at the school of theology, I was met with the following responses: (1) because the gospel always offers God's grace and peace in all circumstances in both humanity and Creation, including experiences in other religions; (2) because the world has changed; (3) because the community of faith is called to give testimony to God's grace and peace at all times and in all places; and (4) because the Christian community discovers the gospel in a new way when it lives out the gospel in the world and for the world that God loves. All of these responses are valid and have solid theological grounding and the ability to guide encounters, interactions, and dialogues with people of other religions.

It is not a new question for the Christian tradition. There is Christian theological literature that approached this question from as far back as the first century, even though Global Christianity has tended to marginalize or ignore this literature in theological and ministerial education. Nonetheless, we can no longer ignore this question. Rather, we must identify examples in our Christian religion that affirm the importance of dialogues and theologies with people of other religions.

For example, the passages describing Hagar and Ishmael in Genesis have been interpreted from an inter-religious perspective. Linguistic and biblical studies scholars have suggested that Hagar gives YHWH a name analogous to that of an Egyptian deity.⁶ Islamic literature also refers to these texts, creating a point of contact between these narratives and the theologies of the covenant and promise in the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions.

In the book of Isaiah there is a clear reference to Cyrus as "The Messiah" of Israel (Isaiah 45). Hebrew biblical tradition takes a non-Jewish foreigner and grants him the exclusive title of God's "chosen one" or "anointed one." It is evident that Isaiah's Hebrew biblical tradition makes a contextual maneuver to give meaning and direction to the life of the people as he presents a political and theological proposal that is risky and necessary for the survival of the people of Israel.

The passage of Acts 10 presents an encounter between Peter and Cornelius that has been interpreted as an encounter between a Jewish Christian and a pagan, with a certain sympathy for the Jewish tradition. This passage highlights the Holy Spirit's role in the encounter and the development of Christianity's expansion to the Gentiles. The passage also challenges a dualist interpretation of Creation – that which is sacred and that which is profane. The Holy Spirit breaks this ethnic-religious paradigm in order to reassert the state of the cosmos: "do not call anything impure that God has made clean" (Acts 10:15), and Peter theologically expresses it by saying "but God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean" (Acts 10:28b).

Most apologetic literature from the first centuries is inter-religious in character. Quite a few Patristic fathers and mothers of the church appropriated practices, discourses, and theological proposals from other traditions – philosophies and religions – in order

to clarify, justify, and legitimize the Christian religion. It is important to recognize that the Christian religion *Christianized* elements of other religions, and gave these elements new meaning – taking from the old and already known to create something new, yet familiar.

In addition, we find examples of inter-religious encounters and dialogues throughout the history of Christianity. Among the best-known are the apology of Patriarch Timothy of Baghdad with the Abbasid caliphate in the eighth century, and the encounter and dialogue between St Francis of Assisi and the sultan of Egypt, Sheikh al-Malik al-Kamel. Although we lack historic details about St Francis' dialogue with the sultan, Canadian Muslim leader David Liepert suggests that this encounter “had a profound affect [*sic*] on Francis, the Sultan and the Christians and Muslims living then that are still being felt today” (Liepert 2013). What may seem incredible to many Christian communities is that that dialogue continues to impact Muslim communities today.

From the sixteenth century onward, particularly in Asia, Africa, and the Americas, the history of Christianity is replete with inter-religious encounters and dialogues. As already mentioned, dialogue with and theologies of religions have been a constant concern in the life of many Christian communities. Unfortunately, the dominance of Global Christianity's perspective has blinded our historical and theological vision of encounter, dialogue, and theologies of religions. It is important to point out that not all encounters and theologies of religions have fomented peace and justice. The history of Christianity in our Latin American continent is telling in terms of its devastating encounters with indigenous and African religions – not only with Roman Catholicism but also with different Protestant and Evangelical expressions. At the same time, alongside this history of devastating encounters, there are histories that reveal encounters, interactions, and dialogues that today contribute to theological reflection for justice, peace, and reconciliation.

Finally, the last three decades of the twentieth century saw an impressive outpouring of Christian literature about inter-religious dialogues and theologies. With the legacy of the Second Vatican Council in the Roman Catholic Church, Protestant and Evangelical mission conferences sponsored by the International Committee, and later the World Council of Churches, and the Lausanne Movement assemblies originally sponsored by Billy Graham's evangelization organization, theological reflection and the missional practice of inter-religious dialogue were enriched by pluri-confessional, international, and inter-religious contributions.⁷

The literature is expansive, and it is not the purpose of this chapter to delve into it. However, it is important to identify some of the shared theological reasons for Christian communities to participate in the missional task of inter-religious dialogue. First, God is present in other religions, and that presence is evident in people's lives. For this reason, we approach inter-religious dialogue knowing that “we are on sacred ground,” and we share struggles, disappointments, joys, and hope that nourish our religious experience. We call this dialogue a *dialogue for life*. Second, Christian traditions have the responsibility of discovering God's grace in people of other religions. One of the inter-religious dialogue practices springing from this second shared reason is theological/professional

dialogue. This kind of dialogue is also known as *dialogue for theological exchange*. Usually it is religious scholars who participate in this kind of dialogue, even though there are also lay people that participate and exchange theological perspectives from their religions. Third, Christian traditions can exchange and learn spiritual disciplines – such as prayer, contemplation, fasting, and so on – from other religions, and these disciplines can nourish the religious life of communities. This kind of dialogue is often called a *dialogue of religious or spiritual experience*. Participation in this kind of dialogue is inclusive and is very open to be informed by people's everyday experiences of religious spirituality. Fourth, Christian traditions have the imperative of taking part along with other religions in strategies and actions for human wellbeing and the protection of Creation. This dialogue has been known as a *dialogue for action* and is characterized by political participation for justice, peace, and the liberation of humanity and Creation. I'd like to point out that in all of these kinds of inter-religious dialogue, most documents do not rule out the possibility of an evangelizing experience; however, it is not their main purpose.

These examples defy two false premises that are usually brought up when discussing the importance of inter-religious dialogue: that inter-religious dialogue is a Western invention of modern liberal Western theology, and that inter-religious dialogue usually serves to weaken or discredit the faith. Clearly there has been development in theologies and strategies of inter-religious dialogues in Western and Global Christianity contexts. At the same time, assuming that inter-religious dialogue is the domain of Global Christianity is a mistake, as it is World Christianity perspectives that should inform and shape our response to the fundamental question, "Why should inter-religious dialogue matter to our academic and grassroots Christian communities?"

Discovering Responses to the Fundamental Question in My Inter-Religious Christian Pilgrimage: Theology, Vocation, and the Practice of Inter-Religious Dialogue

"Why should inter-religious dialogue matter to our academic and grass-roots Christian communities?"

Because inter-religious dialogue opens up the opportunity of discovering new theological language.

My first intentional inter-religious experience was a theological conference on justice and solidarity with grassroots communities in Latin America and the Caribbean. Sponsored by the Departamento Ecu  nico de Investigaciones in San Jos  , Costa Rica, the conference brought together people from different indigenous groups from across the continent. After the session on justice, ecumenism, and Christian mission, I shared with the group my passion about Christian evangelization in the continent. I used the term very intentionally, critiquing its use by the Latin American Episcopal Conference in Santo Domingo in 1992, where the importance of "New Evangelization" was posited.⁸

An indigenous colleague from Peru questioned my use of the term “evangelization.” I thought my response to him was highly appropriate because I very much took into consideration the theological critiques of the Santo Domingo declarations by the progressive Catholic community and ecumenical Protestants and evangelicals in the Latin American Council of Churches and Latin American Theological Fraternity. To my surprise, my indigenous colleague objected to the term and my explanation. His simple but convincing argument: “Under the banner of evangelization, our indigenous peoples were robbed of their land, exploited in their labor, displaced from their communities, exterminated in individual as well as collective massacres. Evangelization is a deceiving term that masks the most horrendous contradiction in the Christian tradition: idolatry.”

With these words, my indigenous colleague brought to the fore the history and practice of idolatry in Iberian Christendom and its exportation to Latin America. The memory of this devastating event in the life of the aboriginal nations of the continent transforms the meaning of the word “evangelization,” associating with it a different interpretation from the meaning that I – and many like me – assumed. Consequently, our inter-religious dialogue comes to a halt until we accept that the experience of evangelization does not follow a single model. Furthermore, in order to continue our inter-religious dialogue with indigenous traditions, the term “evangelization” needs to be placed under the scrutiny of the indigenous experience with the practice of evangelization.

Virgilio Elizondo’s *The Future Is Mestizo* (1988) was one of the first theological resources that offered me new theological language with which to reflect on the complex result of the violent encounter between religious traditions in our Latin American contexts. Although Elizondo’s contribution focuses on the character of Christian responses to the encounter and relationships of cultures, it certainly offers insight into the encounters and exchanges with people of other faiths.

Inter-religious dialogue informed by these conditions is important because it compels participants to create a critical and contextual theological language. Secondly, this process conceives a new language around the meaning of the good news of Jesus Christ’s gospel. The possibilities of this new language enrich both groups’ religious perspective and provide the opportunity of discovering a Christian language that can emphasize justice and peace for the indigenous groups of our continent.

“Why should inter-religious dialogue matter to our academic and grassroots Christian communities?”

Because it offers an opportunity to correct theological formulations and retrieve theological richness that is usually ignored or dismissed, yet critically relevant.

The biblical passage of the Transfiguration has often been interpreted in a very limited way: in transfigured Jesus Christ, all prophecies are fulfilled and all of the law is fulfilled. Elijah and Moses’ presence on the mountain of the transfiguration is nothing other than the symbol of all being fulfilled and completed in Jesus Christ.

That was not the interpretation that my *espiritista* friends provided when we read the narrative together (we were doing a combination of dialogue for life and dialogue of religious and spiritual experience). My *espiritista* friends noted that the narrative describes a conversation among Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. The text in Matthew says, "Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus." The text in Luke says, "Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem." Mark's version says, "And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus." So many years of reading and preaching about these stories without ever "seeing" that detail in the narrative.

The perspective of Global Christianity rules out the possibility that Moses and Elijah could be spirits talking with Jesus. Defined within the context of modernity, the interpretation remains symbolic and closes the door on any other possibilities – modernity does not believe in the world of the spirits.

The perspective of World Christianity offers other alternatives. To begin with, the world of the spirits has not disappeared with the arrival of the modern world. Paradoxically, the modern world and the spirit world coexist, characterized by a slew of tensions and contradictions. Unfortunately, our Latina/o Caribbean *tradiciones evangélicas* have been marked by a legacy of modernity. Nevertheless, the world of the spirits is very present and interacts in our daily life and devotional and worship life as *una comunidad evangélica*.

My experience with the spirit world was a slow and at times rocky and complex process. I was facing the new in my inter-religious activities with *espiritistas* and friends belonging to various Afro Antillean traditions, who, in addition to practicing their faith, embrace Roman Catholicism. My hybrid Euro American and Caribbean heritage – the old – did not leave me *una interpretación evangélica* that was not a dismissal of the spirit world as superstition or demoniacal. I needed to give meaning and direction to this experience that challenged my limited Euro Caribbean *evangélico* theological interpretation. My theological legacy did not offer a grounded answer to my theological questions emerging from my encounter, exchange, and interaction with my *espiritistas* and Afro Caribbean religious colleagues.

My inquiries began to find answers in the work of Orlando Espín, particularly two of his books, *Faith of the People* (1997) and *Building Bridges, Doing Justice* (2009).⁹ Espín, with other Latina/o theologians, keeps a tight conversation between theology as a scholarly discipline and theology as embodied in the daily-life experience of our people, including people of other religions, yet in relationship with Christian circles. Espín offers a theological proposal that easily translates into the practice and contextual theologies of inter-religious dialogue.

Following Espín's theological proposal and creating a unique Afro Cuban Christian theology is the work of Michelle Gonzalez. Her work in *Afro-Cuban Theology: Religion, Race, Culture, and Identity* (2006) shows the beauty of religious and theological reflection in-between religious worlds – her Roman Catholic tradition and Afro Cuban religions. In her work she critically examines popular stories and devotional practices which point to the particularity of religious interactions between Afro Cuban popular

religion and Roman Catholic popular devotion. In her argument she attempts to reduce the damaging assumptions of many Euro American theologians to elide Latina/o theology with Latin American Theologies of Liberation, and offers an academic religious and theological framework that helps inter-religious endeavors.

Moreover, in her essay "Lydia Cabrera: Translator of the Afro-Cuban World," Gonzalez offers a challenge to professional theologians by way of discussing one of Cuba's most important anthropologists of Afro Cuban religions. In Gonzalez' words, we see the theological challenge with deep implications for inter-religious dialogue. She declares, "the study of African Diaspora religion throughout the Americas challenges the rigid lines drawn between Black, Latino/a, and Latin American within liberation theologies. It also undermines the assumption that the religion of the marginalized in the Americas is exclusively Christian" (Gonzalez 2013: 69).

The recent work of Angel Santiago-Vendrell (2010, 2103), a Methodist of Pentecostal background, also offers theological grounding for inter-religious dialogue. Santiago-Vendrell is working on a theology of the Holy Spirit that contributes to both a theology of religion and the practice of inter-religious dialogue. Constructing his theological grounding on a basis from both Euro American theologians of religions and Latino/a theologians, Vendrell's methodology embodies ecumenical dialogue for the sake of understanding and engaging with people of other religions. These Latina/o colleagues have offered important theological insights to my practical inquiries in my inter-religious experiences.

This slow, rocky, and complex process came to a moment of clarity when I gave a course on the mission of the ancient church. Reading the literature of the founding fathers and mothers of the ancient church – a time where the church is one – I discovered in prayers, theological reflections, theological treatises, apostolic letters, and ancient hymns that the world of the spirits is neither superstition nor demonic. To the contrary, the church's mission and Christian theology incorporate the spirit world, particularly the world of saints who live in the Lord. Moreover, Christian literature of the period points to the relationship between the world of the living and the world of the dead, especially those who have died in Christ.

A first example comes from Tertullian of Carthage (160-220 CE), considered to be the first theologian to propose Christian language around theology of the Trinity. In addition, Tertullian, along with Priscilla and Maximilla, was associated with a charismatic movement (namely Montanism), providing charismatic churches today a sense of continuity with ancient Christian tradition. In a pastoral letter to a widow in his community Tertullian offers the following pastoral care advice: "She prays for his soul, and begs repose for him and his company in the first resurrection, and offers (sacrifice) on the anniversary days of his death. For if she does not these things, she has, as much as lies in her, divorced him."¹⁰ The advice protects the relationship between the widow and her dead husband. A more sympathetic modern worldview would say the advice restricts the widow. A more hostile modern worldview would say the advice is absurd. In a pre-modern worldview, and, in my opinion, in our grassroots Latina/o Caribbean religious imaginary, the advice points to rediscovering the importance of the *relationship*

between the living and the dead. Such a relationship is part of daily life in our communities. Our religious imaginary includes different ways of relating to our ancestors.

Cyprian of Carthage (d. 258 CE), bishop of the ancient church, writes to one of his fellow bishops and urges him to mutual prayer. Prayer is profoundly relational and eschatological in character. Cyprian exhorts, in *Letters* 56[60]:5,

Let us remember one another in concord and unanimity. Let us on both sides [of death] always pray for one another. Let us relieve burdens and afflictions by mutual love, that if one of us, by the swiftness of divine condescension, shall go hence the first, our love may continue in the presence of the Lord, and our prayers for our brethren and sisters not cease in the presence of the Father's mercy.

In addition to these examples of theologians, martyrs Perpetua and Felicitas, in the treatises narrating their martyrdom, point out the intimate relationship with their family members that have died in the Lord, and the hope they have of seeing them. They also briefly discuss the continuous relationship that they will have with their families and the community of faith to which they belong.

It is no coincidence that this theological literature comes from northern Africa. Once again, I'd like to emphasize the importance of stepping into the world of inter-religious dialogue through the experience and theology of World Christianity – starting from perspectives from Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, the Pacific region, and many of our immigrant communities. The similarities in the religious imaginary are obvious, and at times profound. While the theological heritage of Global Christianity insists on a superstitious or demonic interpretation of the spirit world, the older literature of the Christian religion provides us another theological starting point for our dialogue with followers of the world of the spirits – indigenous religions, *espiritistas*, Afro Diaspora traditions – which greatly influence our charismatic evangelical imaginary. For me, this experience goes beyond reassuming a theological postulate from the Roman Catholic tradition. Rather, it has to do with recovering a theology and practice of the church that we often try to emulate – the ancient church. Surprisingly, the literature of this period not only puts into relief our own experience, but also affirms the relational character of the life of the living with the life of our ancestors.

“Why should inter-religious dialogue matter to our academic and grassroots Christian communities?”

Because it provides an alternative interpretation to negative stereotypes about people of other religions, helps in standing against lies, violent speech, and acts that threaten the wellbeing of people of other religions, and creates opportunities to do justice for the whole community.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks transformed the way I teach my courses on mission and Christian theologies of religion. That very fall, I had just started a course on the history and theologies of the encounter between Islam and Christianity. We were barely into the semester, and the entire syllabus needed to change. Starting with a class of eight

students, all of a sudden I found myself with the dilemma of limiting the number of people in the class, as by the last day of registration the waiting list had increased from zero to twenty-two students. I felt overwhelmed, as though I was carrying an enormous burden on my shoulders. It dawned on me that the course would not only be a historical and theological exposition of Muslim–Christian encounter and interactions; it would also be an opportunity to present balanced information to a community whose opinion of Islam mostly ranged from ignorance to naïve appreciation.

As hostility against the Muslim community in the United States increased, I made the decision to highlight historical events in the *coexistence* of Christianity and Islam. I recovered (and discovered) Islam's significant contributions to the Iberian peninsula, particularly to Spain. I pinpointed inter-religious dialogues and exchanges of practices and religious art between Islam and Christianity in the early Middle Ages. I decided to expose the students to this history, trying to provide different examples of relations between the two religions. The goal was to present to the students an understanding of the different alternatives Christian and Islamic communities had at their disposal in configuring their relationship.

In that pedagogical undertaking, I discovered a document titled *Summa Theologiae* in Arabic, or a Christian *kalam*, from the ninth century from what it is today Palestine. The *Summa* is an apologetic document that appropriates the literary style and religious character of the Koran.¹¹ On the one hand, the document clarifies what Christian orthodoxy is around the theology of the Trinity for the Christian community. On the other hand, the document demonstrates a comprehensive knowledge of the Islamic religion and its postulates, practices, and religious rituals, and the way that the Christian community can confuse its Christian faith with the Islamic faith. The *Summa* is a literary theological example of a practice the Christian community should take up in any inter-religious context: holding a double mirror to itself. On the one hand, the Christian community, as a minority in its context, is fighting to keep its Christian identity alive. On the other hand, the Christian community discerns the identity of the Islamic community, respects and examines it, and discerns what it means to be a community of faith in the face of a powerful Islamic community.

The document came to be an invaluable resource for theological reflection. The students learned that not all Christian communities in the Islamic world were persecuted; that the Christian community faced great challenges when its primary language – Arabic – was also the official language of Islam, and for this reason, the language used in religious events in both religions;¹² that the Christian community appropriated certain literary and oral styles of Islam and used them to clarify the Christian faith; that the dynamics of religious interaction are complex and require discernment, analysis, and reflection; that being a religious minority makes one live the faith in a different way.

The most illuminating exercise was inviting Muslims to participate in our class and discussing how living as a minority, particularly as a threatened and persecuted minority, impacts a religion. The *Summa* allowed us to rediscover the historical memory of a minority Christian community and imagine, considering the testimony

of the Muslims, first, what it means to be a minority religious community in this moment in the United States, and second, what Christian mission should look like in this moment.

The group arrived at the conclusion that in that moment, the Christian mission of our communities was to (1) educate ourselves about Islam and other religions; (2) challenge and correct the ignorance promulgated by interest groups; (3) interact in not only a civilized but also a Christian manner – promoting hospitality, justice, and peace; and (4) learn to live in the ambiguity, mystery, and tension of religious encounters, acting in such a way that we promote justice and peace (Griffith 1990).

In 2006, the first Christian–Lukumí inter-religious dialogue was held in Miami, Florida, on February 23-6. Sponsored by the Center for Latino/a Catholicism and led by Orlando Espín, two Roman Catholics, two Lukumí followers, one of them a high priest of the tradition, and myself gathered to have a dialogue for *theological exchange*. The experience, the first of its kind in the United States, was rich and generated friendships and new theological perspectives that continue to shape my vocation as a theological educator. My experience in this dialogue of theological exchange enlarged my questions about my own charismatic tradition and my Latino/Caribbean worldview. While most Global Christianity questions about Jesus focus on, “Who is Jesus?” my experience in this dialogue of theological exchange challenges me to explore the question, “What does Jesus do?”

There have been quite a few occasions when I have concluded that two of the most important benefits of taking part in inter-religious dialogues guided by a World Christianity perspective are discovering that the dialogue can be sacramental in character, and that, as a result of this sacramental character, grace overflows and the faith is made all the richer.

Challenges In and Suggestions For Inter-Religious Dialogues

After sharing some vignettes from my inter-religious pilgrimage to offer some responses to our fundamental question, “Why should inter-religious dialogue matter to our academic and grassroots Christian communities?” I’d like to identify several challenges and suggestions for this important missional and theological endeavor. My comments will be brief.

Challenges

1. One has to consider that there are non-Christian religious communities that are not interested in inter-religious dialogue because of the pressure and energy that such an activity involves. Many non-Christian traditions are focused on fighting to maintain a religious identity abroad completely outside of their “natural” contexts. One must be aware and conscious that in many instances

our interest in dialogue may mean an extra burden, and that the participation of other traditions may be forced and not necessarily genuine. If we recognize that inter-religious dialogue can be yet another burden on communities' already difficult religious lives abroad, our choice to postpone dialogue can actually be an act of hospitality.

2. The condition of being a minority, threats and persecution, discrimination, and media disinformation can complicate the planning of and participation in inter-religious dialogue. Sometimes conflicts within religious groups can also affect participation and the planning of dialogue. One must at the very least be aware of these factors in processes and strategies to initiate dialogue.
3. The historical legacy of Christianity's relationship with non-Christian traditions influences perceptions of and strategies, topics, and proposals for inter-religious dialogue. Two obvious examples are the legacy of the Christian crusades against the Jews and Muslims and the evangelization of indigenous peoples and African groups on our continent.
4. The character and history of a religious tradition can influence and even determine whether or not there can be inter-religious dialogue. For example, certain Muslim groups are open to dialogue in the United States. In other countries, these same Muslim groups may choose not to take part in dialogues. Whatever the case, one must build a platform of trust, which sometimes requires time and patience.
5. For the reason given in point (4), in some instances, not all inter-religious dialogue is healthy or desirable and has a happy ending. Expectations for a dialogue should be modest, evaluated in the process, and modifiable. Every small achievement should be celebrated. Note that in most Global Christianity literature there are happy endings. These have come to be the modern liberal ideal of how inter-religious dialogues should end. This ideal is entirely false.
6. Inter-religious dialogue can intensify and engender complications that communities may not be prepared for. Therefore, on occasions, when the goal of the dialogue is met, it should end. One must learn to judge when an inter-religious dialogue needs to pause or end. There is no reason to keep a dialogue going if it is not fueled from within.
7. One theological question around inter-religious dialogue is the interpretation of Jesus as the only savior. As stated earlier, unfortunately, the legacy of Global Christianity has left us is polarizing. We assume that texts such as "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6), "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (Philippians 2:10), and others have a single interpretation associated with them. The particularity of Jesus Christ, as Kwame Bediako (1996) and Mercy Amba Oduyoye (1996) point out, is not an abstract proposition. For the Jews and Gentiles of the first centuries, the confession "Jesus Christ is Lord" is defiant in the face of the Roman Empire and speaks of new loyalties, loyalties different from those the Empire demanded. To claim that "Jesus Christ is

Lord” without context or its socio-religious implications is a vacuous confession. The particularity of Jesus, as Bediako and Amba Oduyoye discuss, is debated and forged along with other religious and social proposals and alternatives. Hence the singularity of Jesus is rooted in history and has meaning; it demands new loyalties that are not only religious but political in character. This African interpretation of the singularity of Jesus as located in a specific context makes it clear why Matthew said, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

Suggestions

1. We must develop Bible studies and biblical training programs where biblical texts and texts from Christian communities are interpreted from the perspective of inter-religious encounter. Some examples – one already mentioned – are Cyrus as the Messiah; the narrative of the diviner, Samuel, and Saul; and Psalms 74 and 104, where two poems about the relationship of God with the Leviathan are presented, both poems containing different theological implications.
In the New Testament we find Jesus’ encounters with excluded people. We can study texts that describe relationships between Christians and Jews, Jews who believe in Jesus Christ and Gentiles, Gentiles and Christian Gentiles, and so on. In addition, there are texts that illustrate tensions with mystery religions and other religions in the region. In biblical interpretation circles in India, there has been research comparing the parables of the gospels with those said by gurus in Buddhism and Hinduism.
2. Not all people in the community of faith may be ready for this type of Christian ministry. But this does not mean they cannot take part in the ministry of inter-religious dialogue. Christian traditions are rich in the ministries within ministries they can offer. Leaders involved in the ministry of inter-religious dialogue can strive to create prayer circles and to host fasts, hospitality events, and prayer services for the ministry of the faith community. We should and we *can* learn to pray in a way that affirms hospitality, that gives people of other religions dignity and promotes a beautiful and healthy expression of the gospel. The congregation can actively participate without having to be at the front of the dialogue experience.
3. The ministry of inter-religious dialogue is one that creates spaces for discerning, conversing, praying, reflecting, listening to sorrows, breaking bread, sharing testimonies, and celebrating God’s grace. In the creation of these spaces, a contextual and rooted Christian identity is generated, yet inter-religious dialogues continue to defy our identity, keeping Christian communities in an eschatological awareness: the gospel is always anew.

In addition to creating new spaces in the life of the congregation, new spaces in the community are also created: spaces for religious festivals, religious theatre, events to share literature of other religions, events to learn about and celebrate the cultures of people of other religions. It is important to remember that the ministry of inter-religious dialogue can produce new spaces of coexistence outside of sanctuaries.

I'd like to conclude by bringing back the theology of one of our Disciples of Christ women, Ramona Álamo. Ramona has left us an inspiring legacy of Puerto Rican Christian music. Moreover, she has left us a legacy of theology that challenges paradigms passed down to us from Global Christianity. She invites us to a simple, but profound, project: to *empezar de nuevo*, or "begin anew." With the refrain of her hymn "A Empezar," we can examine our varied and broad Christian history and the perspectives that Christians from the regions of World Christianity offer to us, select from our Global Christianity legacy that which is relevant – knowing full well that what today may be relevant tomorrow may not be – and with deep faith in the guidance of the Spirit, seek an inter-religious dialogue that may heal our peoples and save our Creation.

Notes

- 1 For more information on the demographic change in the Christian religion see Johnson and Ross (2010).
- 2 This terminology, like any theory, has its limits. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this chapter, it helps clarify the theological implications of inter-religious dialogue in Latin America and the Caribbean and among Latinas/os in the US and Canada.
- 3 By "religious otherness," I mean seeing people of other religions as an essential, distant, and foreign "other." From a missional perspective, this "religious otherness" is an object of study for their evangelization, domination, or initiation into Global Christianity.
- 4 For a deeper discussion of this topic, see Bediako (2008).
- 5 For a more extensive discussion of my perspective on biography, theology, and mission studies, see Cardoza-Orlandi (2004).
- 6 African American theologian Delores Williams, along with biblical scholars such as Musa M. Dube and Dora Mbuwayesango, have brought forth a reinterpretation of these narratives. See Williams (1993). For an exposition of the work of African scholars in the field of biblical interpretation, see Dube, Mbubi, and Mbuwayesango (2012).
- 7 There are many anthologies of these documents in multiple languages. A good, well-organized introduction is found in Scherer and Bevans (1992). More recent documents have been published by the various organizations.
- 8 To read the official declaration by the Latin American Episcopal Conference, see http://www.celam.org/conferencias/Documento_Conclusivo_Santo_Domingo.pdf, or see CELAM (1992).
- 9 Espín's work is *teología en conjunto*, collaborative in nature. Most of his edited books illustrate Espín's ecumenical and inter-religious convictions and commitments.
- 10 See *The Catholic Encyclopedia* online, "Prayers for the Dead." Retrieved June 2012 from <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen>.
- 11 For a detailed discussion of the historical context and theological impact of this document, see Griffith (1990).

- 12 In certain countries in Asia, particularly Malaysia, this issue of religious language is extremely complicated. For example, the Arabic term for God, "Allah," has been used by the Christian community for more than 500 years. Yet, in the last decade of the twentieth century, more conservative Islamic groups designed a law that prevented Christians from using Arabic in their worship. The problem has become exacerbated as conservative and fundamentalist groups press the government to persecute Christians on the basis of the law, with no historical awareness of the use of the language for God in Arabic.

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INDEX

- Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the U.S. (ACHTUS), xi, xiii, xiv, 32, 62, 67, 75, 112
- Acompañamiento*, 17, 156, 183–186, 219, 250, 258, 259, 261, 263, 264, 265, 368
- Ajiaco*, 115, 292–296
- Alves, Rubem, 67, 68, 478, 491
- Anzaldúa, Gloria, 6, 20, 41, 42, 51, 262, 266, 302, 332, 335–338, 346, 355,
- Aponte, Edwin D., viii, xi, 3, 10, 11, 72, 78, 87, 170, 213, 214, 217, 220, 2, 246, 271, 278, 279, 367, 398, 399, 405, 408, 410, 417, 436, 465, 472
- Aquinas, Thomas, 135, 140, 147, 218,
- Aquino, M. Pilar, 21, 22, 31, 73, 76, 86, 131, 170, 178, 182, 188, 197, 256, 264, 265, 267, 272, 276, 278, 295, 301, 306–308, 330, 344–346, 350, 352–355, 359–362, 399
- Association for Hispanic Theological Education (AETH), 37, 75, 188, 189
- Bañuelas, Arturo, 23–25, 31, 76, 86, 87, 131, 137, 152, 188, 247, 288–290, 308, 310, 311, 345, 346, 367, 382, 384, 432, 436
- Barth, Karl, 53, 54, 67, 68, 99, 130, 137, 152, 242
- Bible; biblical, 5, 7, 15–18, 20, 23–26, 33, 56, 59, 62, 65, 66, 74, 76, 77, 80, 91, 93–96, 99, 102, 104, 107, 108, 111, 112, 127, 134, 137, 148, 150, 164, 170, 200, 205, 226, 233, 234, 237, 242, 244, 256–258, 274, 275, 292, 320–323, 366–370, 382–384, 393, 402, 408–411, 421, 430, 444, 445, 447, 448, 456, 458, 479, 482, 489, 490
- Boff, Leonardo, 187, 188, 306
- Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo, 46, 49–51
- Carmona, Víctor, viii, xii, 263
- Cavazos-González, Gilberto, viii, xii, 29, 31, 155, 167, 170, 180, 188, 201, 212, 419, 422, 423, 426, 427, 430, 431, 435, 436
- Chávez, César, 73, 87, 195, 278, 457
- Church, xi, xii, xiv, xv, 2, 5, 7, 9, 10, 17, 19, 22, 27, 31, 32, 44, 53–67, 71–80, 83–86, 92, 95–97, 103, 104, 111, 113, 117, 119, 121, 125, 130, 132, 133, 138–141, 156, 163, 175, 177, 184, 186, 191–197, 199–212, 219, 232, 233, 236, 241, 252, 256, 257, 259, 260, 263, 270, 271, 273–277, 301, 319, 321–323, 325, 330, 332, 340, 349, 350, 358, 366, 387, 389–392, 395, 397, 398, 404, 406, 407, 412, 414, 415, 427, 430–432, 439–441, 443–447, 453, 460, 462, 463, 467, 476, 477, 478, 480, 482, 484, 485

- Codina, Víctor, 273, 274, 278
- Conde-Frazier, Elizabeth, 11, 32, 103, 107, 108, 178–180, 188, 205, 206, 212, 213, 274, 278, 322, 326, 369, 383, 408, 409, 417, 418, 425, 426, 436, 443, 444, 449, 450
- Conjunto; De conjunto; En conjunto*, vii, 7, 8, 17, 24, 56, 58, 65–67, 72–76, 87, 107–109, 116, 124, 132, 171, 181, 188, 189, 196, 212, 213, 250, 254, 260, 285, 294, 304, 310, 318, 325, 327, 331, 332, 334, 345, 417, 421, 433, 436, 438, 450, 490
- Convivencia*, 17, 18, 30, 33, 112–113, 181, 182, 186, 189
- Costas, Orlando, v, 5, 211, 212, 246, 463, 467–469, 471–473
- Culture, x, xi, xii, 2–4, 7, 8, 11, 17, 19, 20, 22, 27–32, 36, 39, 41, 42, 44, 45, 47, 49, 53–56, 60, 62, 67, 69, 70, 73, 77, 78, 80, 81, 83–87, 92–94, 96–101, 105–108, 113, 124, 125, 129, 132–134, 141, 149, 152, 160, 164, 168, 171, 174, 177, 178, 193–195, 197, 198, 201, 208, 210, 212–214, 218, 219, 230, 232–236, 243, 246, 251, 255, 256, 261–264, 266, 272, 276–279, 285, 288, 289, 291–303, 306–310, 313–320, 322–326, 332, 346, 351, 360, 366, 367, 383, 389, 390, 392, 393, 395, 397, 399, 402, 403, 405, 406, 409, 411–413, 415, 417, 418, 427, 428–430, 434, 436, 437, 440–443, 449, 451, 454, 462, 466, 468, 472, 473, 482, 483, 490, 491
- Dávila, María Teresa, viii, xii, 24, 251, 252, 255–258, 265, 266, 277, 370, 383
- De la Torre, Miguel, 3, 11, 58, 65–66, 68, 72, 87, 170, 188, 213, 214, 217, 219, 229, 246, 253, 254, 261, 266, 278, 279, 292–296, 308–310, 324, 326, 362, 363, 370, 383, 398, 399, 417, 436, 456, 457, 472
- DeAnda, Neomi, vii, xi, 31, 144, 161, 170, 178, 179, 188, 189, 309
- Deck, A. Figueroa, 58, 131, 132, 152, 189, 197, 198, 269, 272, 320, 326, 366, 383, 398, 399, 425, 427, 436, 444, 450
- Díaz, Miguel, H., 3, 10, 11, 31, 33, 98, 108, 126, 156, 157, 161, 165, 170, 171, 188, 189, 197, 213, 217–220, 222, 230, 323, 366, 383
- Dignidad*, 66, 250–252, 254, 266
- Diversity, 2, 9, 23, 36, 53, 62, 80, 83, 85, 87, 97, 106, 108, 129, 157, 158, 159, 169, 176, 186, 199, 200, 203, 204, 206, 207, 213, 249, 255, 266, 270–272, 285, 289, 291, 293, 298, 299, 302, 303, 315, 319–321, 349, 353, 359, 368, 388, 397, 398, 404, 438, 441, 442, 446, 470
- DuBois, W.E.B., 37, 38
- Dussell, Enrique, 44, 45, 49
- Ecclesiology; ecclesiological, viii, 19, 87, 130, 176, 177, 188, 191–192, 196–214, 249, 252, 353
- Ecumenism; ecumenical, vii, 3, 5, 6, 8, 20, 29, 65, 67, 71–86, 97, 108, 109, 116, 124–126, 130, 150, 169, 189, 209, 213, 230, 250, 261, 264, 273, 276, 291, 319–323, 325, 326, 450, 451, 475, 476, 481, 482, 484, 490, 491
- Elizondo, Virgilio, v, 5, 11, 16, 18–20, 23, 27, 31, 31, 67, 68, 111, 130, 131, 152, 155, 156, 159, 170, 182, 187, 188, 195, 197–199, 212, 218, 219, 230, 238–241, 243, 246, 250, 251, 261, 266, 269, 272, 277, 278, 284, 286–291, 293, 299–301, 306, 307, 309, 319, 320, 326, 366, 367, 383, 387, 388, 392, 398, 399, 421, 427, 429–431, 436, 454, 464, 472, 482, 491
- Espanglish; Spanglish, 9, 11, 30, 32, 47, 49, 52, 81–85, 87, 125, 171, 213, 384, 416, 418, 437
- Espín, Orlando O., vii, xii, 3, 10, 27, 28, 31, 33, 56, 57, 60–62, 68, 76, 87, 92, 97–100, 107–109, 125, 126, 130, 132, 134, 152, 171, 178, 179, 181, 186–189, 194, 197, 198, 201, 212, 213, 217, 218, 230, 241, 246, 265, 272, 290, 306, 311, 322, 323, 326, 331, 345, 346, 362, 369, 387, 388, 390, 394, 399, 406, 417, 418, 426, 429, 430, 431, 437, 443, 449, 450, 451, 455, 457, 458, 465, 471, 472, 475, 483, 487, 491

- Espinoza, Gastón, 57, 199, 212, 278, 318, 310, 320, 326, 363, 454, 457, 459, 460, 472
- Feminist; Feminism, viii, 6, 8, 15, 17, 21, 22, 31, 41, 52, 67–70, 73, 76, 86, 98, 125, 131, 150, 164, 169, 170, 188, 213, 262, 263, 266, 267, 276, 278, 279, 295, 308, 321, 322, 330–332, 334, 335, 344–363, 399
- Fernández, Eduardo, viii, xi, 3, 11, 198, 269, 272, 274, 276, 278, 286, 309, 311, 367, 370, 375, 383, 384, 398, 399, 405, 413, 418, 425, 427, 429, 437
- García, Alberto, 425, 429, 432, 437
- García, Ismael, 251, 266
- García, Sixto J., 140, 141, 144, 152, 187, 188, 218
- García-Johnson, Oscar, 176, 177, 184, 185, 186, 188
- García-Rivera, Alejandro, v, 64, 177, 186, 218, 221, 222, 224–227, 230, 272, 275, 276, 378, 398, 399, 428, 437, 459
- García-Treto, Francisco, 23, 25, 26, 31, 32, 111, 124, 268, 283
- Goizueta, Roberto S., xiii, 27, 32, 55, 63–65, 68, 70, 126, 131, 132, 135, 152, 156, 158, 159, 161, 170, 180, 182, 184, 188, 189, 198, 218, 220, 224, 228, 230, 256, 265, 266, 272, 301, 306, 368, 383, 391–393, 396, 398, 399, 405, 417, 431, 437, 450, 451, 470
- González, Justo L., v, xii, 5, 11, 23, 55, 56, 58–60, 67, 71, 72, 107, 108, 111, 127, 155, 156, 182, 189, 203, 238, 240, 245, 246, 309, 326, 450, 451
- González, Michelle A., 155, 156, 158, 159, 167, 170, 201, 212, 217, 230, 276, 279, 292, 295–298, 320, 353, 356, 358, 359, 361, 426, 437, 450, 483, 484
- Guadalupe, Virgin of, 19, 20, 27, 31, 43, 116, 117, 150, 178, 180, 187, 188, 194, 195, 197, 277, 278, 283, 286, 287, 289, 300, 302, 305, 306, 309, 320, 326, 358, 389, 394–396, 398, 399, 407, 430, 432, 464
- Gutiérrez, Gustavo, 67, 69, 152, 188, 223, 288, 306, 320, 322, 326, 424, 428
- Henderson-Espinoza, Robyn, viii, xii, 20, 32, 262, 266
- Hidalgo, Jacqueline, 29, 32, 123, 124, 155, 170
- Hispanic Summer Program, xii, 5, 67, 74, 320
- Hispanic Theological Initiative, xi, xii, 5, 67, 74, 345
- Holy Spirit, xiii, 23, 57, 63, 64, 93, 102–104, 131, 133, 137, 140, 173–189, 202, 205, 207, 229, 241, 243, 245, 249, 251, 252, 273–275, 301, 414, 418, 422, 425, 426, 434, 435, 438, 479, 484
- Hope, viii, 9, 22, 26, 38, 58, 60, 61, 68, 95, 99, 103, 108, 119, 135, 144, 148, 149, 175, 181–183, 186, 196, 197, 210–212, 222, 228, 231–247, 259, 260, 265, 266, 299, 325, 330, 331, 342, 344, 370, 383, 393, 394, 422, 429, 432, 456, 472
- Hybridity, 18–20, 24, 30, 39, 285, 293, 296, 367, 430
- Imagination, 28, 30, 36, 37, 43–45, 80, 194, 233, 244, 256, 263, 342, 343, 409, 434, 435
- Imago Dei*, 16, 66, 156, 159–161, 166, 176, 179, 185, 187, 276, 300, 359, 427, 437
- Intercultural, xiii, 20, 31, 57, 64, 111, 126, 185, 291, 301, 302, 309, 356, 360, 370
- Isasi-Díaz, Ada M., v, 11, 21–23, 32, 57, 62–63, 67, 69, 76, 87, 111, 156–160, 163–165, 170, 182, 189, 201, 213, 218, 238, 239, 240, 241, 246, 252, 253, 261, 263, 266, 272, 276, 279, 289–291, 294–296, 300, 301, 309, 311, 321, 322, 326, 330, 344, 349, 350, 354, 357, 358, 362, 363, 367, 368, 383, 384, 388, 397, 431, 437
- Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology*, 5, 29, 31, 32, 75, 126, 170, 171, 189, 212, 279, 310, 346, 368, 383, 384, 399, 417, 419, 436, 437, 472, 473
- Kasper, Walter, 140, 142–145, 148, 149, 152

- La lucha*, 21, 31, 46, 65, 175, 197, 203, 221, 228, 230, 233, 235, 243, 244, 246, 266, 268, 283, 284, 294, 299, 303, 327, 331, 332, 350, 363, 392, 398
- La realidad*, 55, 349
- Latinamente*, viii, 3, 9, 15–18, 24, 29–32, 98, 112–119, 122–125, 262, 269, 272
- Latinidad*, 2, 8, 17, 24, 32, 107, 285, 289, 296, 432
- Liturgy, viii, 32, 60, 63, 138, 249, 269–279, 398, 399, 412
- Lo cotidiano*, vii, 4, 6, 15–18, 20–30, 32, 58, 73, 82, 100, 104, 106, 181, 201, 203, 205, 208, 211, 219, 252–260, 263, 279, 299, 331, 345, 357, 397, 405, 406, 410, 412, 430, 433, 454
- Lozada, Francisco, 93–96, 108
- Machado, Daisy L., vii, xii, 31, 76, 86, 170, 203, 213, 267, 276, 278, 308, 346, 361, 399
- Maduro, Otto, v, 182, 188, 189, 306, 309, 322, 326
- Maldonado-Pérez, Zaida, 11, 32, 99, 102, 103, 107, 108, 203, 212, 213, 409, 418, 443, 451
- Martell-Otero, Loida, 11, 23, 32, 67, 70, 87, 99, 102–104, 107–109, 158–160, 165, 170, 171, 188, 189, 201, 205, 212, 213, 278, 308, 318, 327, 409, 417, 418, 436, 438, 450
- Martínez, Juan F., 201, 203, 204, 212–214, 418
- Medellín, Conclusions of, 58, 330
- Medina, Néstor, viii, xiii, 11, 20, 32, 159, 165, 169, 170, 171, 178, 181, 186, 189, 219, 230, 291, 292, 301–303, 305, 309, 442, 443, 451
- Mestizaje, mestizo/a*, viii, xiii, 10, 11, 18–20, 24, 32, 36, 39, 46, 100, 107, 131, 159, 171, 188, 194, 219, 230, 239–241, 250, 252, 254, 261, 263, 277, 283–307, 309, 310, 316, 319, 339–341, 343, 346, 367, 368, 384, 396, 409, 413, 427, 429, 430, 451
- Metz, Johann B., 131–133, 137, 142, 144, 145, 147–149, 152, 153
- MezQueerTaje, 20, 32, 341, 346
- Moltmann, Jürgen, 131, 153, 239, 240, 243, 246
- Mujerista*, viii, 11, 21, 32, 62, 63, 67, 69, 163, 164, 170, 189, 205, 213, 238, 241, 246, 252, 264, 266, 279, 291, 295, 300, 309, 321, 326, 330, 332, 334, 347–363, 367, 384, 425, 431, 437
- Mulataje, mulato/a, mulatez*, 10, 36, 100, 107, 241, 277, 289–292, 294–296, 308, 309, 367, 368, 384, 413
- Nanko-Fernández, Carmen, vii, xiv, 3, 11, 23, 27, 29, 30, 32, 81, 87, 113, 124, 125, 126, 157, 171, 208, 213, 256, 264, 267, 346, 367, 370, 375, 384, 405, 413, 418, 427, 430, 431, 437
- Nican Mopohua*, 19, 150, 286, 287, 305, 394, 398
- Non-innocent, 7, 26, 59, 117, 162, 166
- Pedraja, Luis, viii, xiv, 56, 69, 99–103, 108, 154, 158, 159, 160, 166, 171, 173, 180, 189, 201, 202, 210, 214, 243, 245–246, 324, 327, 408, 409, 418, 465, 473
- Pineda-Madrid, Nancy, viii, xiv, 23, 276, 279, 349, 350, 352, 353, 356, 357, 362, 367, 370, 384, 398, 399
- Pneumatology, viii, xiii, 103, 140, 173–189, 792
- Popular Catholicism, viii, 10, 11, 27, 31, 57, 62–64, 68, 108, 152, 158, 197, 198, 246, 323, 326, 363, 387–400, 406, 407, 425, 431, 432, 437, 450, 465, 472, 491
- Popular Protestantism, viii, 10, 83, 401–419
- Popular religion, religiosity, xii, xiii, 27–28, 31, 57, 60, 62–64, 99, 108, 131, 134, 170, 171, 188, 198, 212, 219, 220, 228, 270–272, 278, 311, 322, 388, 396, 399, 401, 405–410, 412–414, 416–418, 425–427, 430–432, 436, 437, 472, 473
- Quinceañera*, 27, 182, 271, 392
- Rahner, Karl, 15, 130, 133, 136, 137, 148, 153, 217, 229, 230, 383
- Rivera, Mayra, 97, 104–106, 109, 124, 214, 225, 230, 353, 359, 362, 442, 451

- Rivera Pagán, Luis, v, 119, 126, 242, 246, 317, 327, 370, 384
- Rivera Rodríguez, Luis, 24, 26, 33, 367
- Rodríguez, Jeannette, 27, 31, 76, 86, 170, 200, 214, 267, 278, 308, 346, 352, 361, 394, 396, 397, 399, 406, 418, 425, 426, 429, 437, 438
- Rodríguez, José D., 11, 70, 67, 86, 108, 109, 171, 188, 189, 212, 213, 223, 230, 278, 308, 310, 318, 327, 417, 436, 438, 450, 473
- Romero, Gilbert, 27, 111, 400
- Rosario-Rodríguez, Rubén, vii, xiv, 20, 33, 53, 261, 267, 292, 299–302, 306, 307, 310
- Ruiz, Jean-Pierre, vii, xv, 11, 20, 24, 33, 93–95, 109, 111–114, 121, 124, 126, 155, 169, 171, 345, 346, 367, 369, 375, 384, 430, 438
- Segovia, Fernando F., 11, 16, 25, 32, 33, 41, 56, 69, 70, 76, 87, 109, 111, 112, 114, 115, 118, 124–126, 199, 214, 289, 290, 296, 309–311, 321, 325–327, 362, 367, 368, 383, 384, 442, 449, 451
- Sensus fidelium*, 60, 64, 71, 94, 95, 107, 130, 133, 138, 188, 198, 311
- Soliván, Samuel, 175, 176, 182, 183, 185, 186, 189, 275, 289, 290, 310, 367, 427, 438, 492
- Spanglish *see* *Espanglish*
- Spirituality, viii, xi, xii, 4, 25, 57, 63, 103, 147, 163, 174, 178, 182, 188, 189, 205, 206, 212, 213, 241, 247, 249, 251, 270–272, 276, 278, 287, 340, 369, 383, 397, 398–438, 450, 481, 492
- Symbol, 20, 30, 54, 57, 117, 120, 121, 130, 134–136, 150, 150, 151, 152, 153, 169, 176, 177–179, 181, 185, 186, 197, 221, 224, 225, 238, 272–278, 290–294, 299, 356, 368, 389–397, 399, 406, 410, 412, 413, 416–418, 456, 465, 472, 478, 482, 483
- Theodicy, 129–153, 384
- Tillich, Paul, 53, 54, 67, 70, 229, 245, 247, 453, 473
- Tradition, traditioning, xii, 2–7, 9, 11, 15, 20, 27–30, 31, 49, 53–68, 71–86, 91–109, 126, 129–140, 147, 149, 152, 155, 159, 164, 168, 173–188, 191, 192, 198, 200–208, 210, 215, 216, 228, 229, 236, 246, 249–251, 259, 261–264, 271–274, 283–286, 298, 311, 317, 322, 323, 326, 330, 332, 333, 335, 337, 340, 341, 346, 349, 354, 369, 370, 374, 387, 388–394, 397–400, 402, 403, 407, 409, 412, 413, 417, 423, 424, 429, 434, 437, 439–449, 454, 458, 461, 462, 464, 465, 470, 473, 475, 478–489
- Trinity, trinitarian, 58, 98, 99, 107, 108, 130–132, 135, 139–141, 144–146, 148, 152, 170, 176, 179, 180, 183, 185–189, 194, 217, 219, 220, 223, 226–228, 246, 359, 390, 414, 419, 473, 484, 486
- Valentín, Benjamín, 62, 69, 76, 87, 156, 158, 164, 170, 171, 230, 266, 316, 327, 418, 466, 473
- Vatican, Second Council, 64, 91, 92, 126, 136, 152, 157, 191, 198, 273, 276, 480
- Vida cotidiana*, 15–18, 21–23, 30, 116, 205, 408, 437 *see also* *lo cotidiano*
- Villafañe, Eldin, 11, 174, 175, 183, 186, 189, 199, 212, 214, 241, 242, 247, 251, 252, 267, 425, 429, 438, 450, 451
- von Balthasar, Hans, 8, 9, 11, 145, 146, 148, 153,
- Westhelle, Vitor, 199, 214, 223

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